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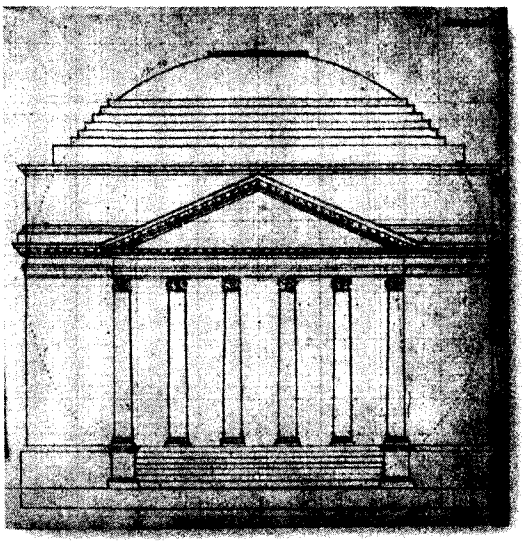

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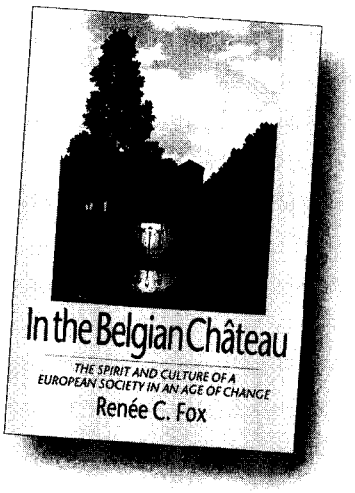
RENÉE C. FOX

In the Belgian Château

The Spirit and Culture of a European Society in an Age of Change



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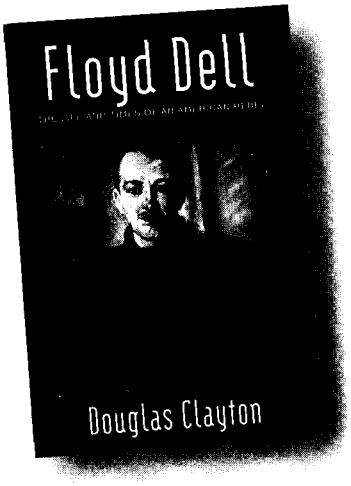

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An Extremely Well-Informed SOB

ARISTIDES

McKisco was "well-informed" on a range of subjects wider than Goethe's—it was interesting to listen to the innumerable facile combinations that he referred to as his opinions.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender Is the Night*

The other morning, over coffee, I had one of those Eureka moments. I was indulging in some splendidly useless reading, in this instance the *Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler.* I have never read a Raymond Chandler novel, but, from an earlier dip in his letters, I have come to have a genuine regard for Chandler. He was not an academic or an intellectual, but he was more than a bit of an artist, though not in the least a pretentious one. Above all, he was a smart guy. He was too easily irascible to be wise, perhaps too leery of being conned to be disinterestedly penetrating, but he was smart in the sense of having a good interior radar for the kind of lies and nonsense that most of us get caught up in. He had a strong notion of what counted and what didn't in a life of limited years. He held a low, not easily refuted, and probably salubrious view of human nature: "The best way to find out if you have any friends," he wrote to his agent Carl Brandt, "is to go broke. The ones that hang on longest are your friends. I don't mean the ones that hang on forever. There aren't any of these."

Drinking coffee, I read a letter that Chandler wrote in 1950 to a friend, which said that he was about to cancel his subscription to the *Saturday Review of Literature.* He had decided that it wasn't good enough to warrant bringing into a house already overloaded with magazines, despite the magazine's claim to improve its readers' minds. "But I must be one of the few living Americans who do not crave to have their minds improved," Chandler wrote. "I know too much already. I would be happier knowing less."

There it was: Eureka! Pow! Zowie! not to say &, *, #, and @! We read certain writers for those moments when they tell us what in our hearts we already know but, for one reason or another, haven't managed to formulate for ourselves. This was such a moment for me.

On the table where I was drinking my coffee and reading Raymond Chandler's letters were the following magazines: the *New York Review of Books,* the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* two copies of *Publishers Weekly,* three issues of the London *Times Literary Supplement,* a *Harper's,* a *New Yorker,* the *Atlantic,* the *New Republic, Poetry,* the *New York Times Book Review,* and the *New York Times Magazine.*

On the same table, were the following books: *The AIA Guide to the Architecture of Washington, D.C.*; *Memories & Commentaries* by Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft; *Mrs. Thatcher's Minister: The Private Diaries of Alan Clark*; *The Mezzanine* by Nicholson Baker; *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience* by Pericles Georges; *Dr. Johnson and Mr. Savage* by Richard Holmes; *The Ruin of Kasch* by Roberto Calasso; *Mosaic* by Lincoln Kirstein; *The Primary Colors* by Alexander Theroux; *Clear and Simple as the Truth: Writing Classic Prose* by Francis-Noël Thomas and Mark Turner; *The Journals of James Boswell,* selected and edited by John Wain; *Ukulele Music—Perduta Gente,* poems by Peter Reading; and, finally, *Characters* by La Bruyère. None of these books, be it noted, has any di-

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rect connection with anything I am working on at the moment.

Elsewhere in this apartment there are bookmarks in books I have begun reading by V. S. Naipaul, Mario Vargas Llosa, Kingsley Amis, Julius Meier-Graefe, Paul Auster, Ryszard Kapuscinski, Maurice Ravel, Dan Jacobson, Stendhal, E. J. Dent, Carl Zuckmayer, E. R. Curtius, Nicholas Mosley, Ned Rorem, and, in the bathroom, sits an extraordinary novel about Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell titled *The World As I Found It,* written by a man named Bruce Duffy. None of these books, either, has to do with anything I am working on or plan to be working on.

I read the daily national edition of the *New York Times.* (I probably should but don't read the *Chicago Tribune,* the largest paper in the city in which I live.) Along with the magazines mentioned above, I read *Commentary,* the *New Criterion,* the *Hudson Review,* the *Sewanee Review,* the *Virginia Quarterly Review,* and the *Kenyon Review.* I do not so much read as breeze through *Vanity Fair, Esquire,* and *Gentlemen's Quarterly,* to all of which I subscribe. I read though do not subscribe to *Tikkun,* the *American Spectator,* the *Nation,* and the *National Review.* I read Hilton Kramer on the visual arts in the weekly *New York Observer* and glimpse the rest of that peach-colored rag for gossip about men and women in magazine and book publishing. Add the things that I read for my work—writing, teaching, editing—and, taken all in all, a fair amount of print finds its way into this apartment and into my brain.

Given all this reading—maybe it adds up to four or five hours a day—you might think me an extremely well-informed SOB. Funny, but I don't in the least feel well-informed. If anything, I feel less and less informed as the years go by. Once upon a time, and not so long ago as all that, one could posit what an educated man or woman ought to know: what languages, what historical narratives, what works of philosophy, literature, music, and art. Since the job description for the educated person seems to have changed a good bit of late—I'm not sure that knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin are still required—what might the well-informed, as distinct from the well-educated, man or woman of our day know? Would he or she be able to name the nine political parties in Mexico (I can name one), recall who Kristen McMenamy, Ron Jeremy, and Tony Little are (I can't), explain a nickel defense, a twelve-tone scale, a neutron (beats me)?

What, really, is the point of being well-informed? Perhaps the first answer to that question is that it relieves one of the embarrassment of seeming ignorant. Having information, knowing the score, the true gen (as Hemingway called it), the real lowdown, brings a thrill of its own special kind. Not only does it separate one from the ignoranti—cognoscenti 48, ignoranti 0—but it gives one the feeling that one is living the life of one's time. As an editor and writer, I have felt an extra inducement for keeping myself informed about the trends, issues, questions, and problems of the day, so that I can write or induce other people to write about them.

Of late, however, I have been feeling the strain of information overload. My storage and retrieval system doesn't seem to function as smoothly as it once did. Some might say that this is the effect of putting on too many winters, but I suspect that the problem is with the amount of information that just keeps piling up until there isn't enough room left in the file cabinets of my mind to sort it out. (I am old enough, after all, to know about SEATO and NATO and the Green Hornet's man whose name was Cato.) I have reached the point, in fact, where I am in search of effective anti-mnemonic devices. Over lunch someone explains to me, in intricate detail, what the import of the salary cap is in the current baseball strike. Pretending to listen intently, hoping that my eyes do not show the thick glaze of a franchise doughnut, I ask myself how can I most efficiently forget all this information, every scrap?

I suppose one of the reasons for being well-informed on everything is so that one can have an opinion on everything. The culture seems very opinionated just now. ("Ron Perelman and Richard Perle," Cathleen Schine writes of her heroine in her novel *Rameau's Niece*; "she knew she disapproved of them both, but which one for which reason?") No one is more opinionated than an intellectual. I am an intellectual. (Finish the syllogism on your own.) One of the delights of being an intellectual is that one is expected to have opinions on everything while incurring responsibility for nothing. But for the formation of these opinions at least a smattering of information is required.

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Alas, on an increasingly wide range of subjects, I find I am perfectly pleased to be without any opinion at all. On so many political questions, social scandals, academic disputes, I find my antipathies nicely riven down the center, which makes forming an opinion favoring one side or the other a bit difficult. Besides, opinion generally—and my own in particular—has come to seem less and less interesting to me. A human being, after all, is not an Op-Ed page; the least impressive of thoughts are formulated in the personal equivalent of editorials. In his novel *Guerrillas*, V. S. Naipaul remarks about a character he clearly despises that she had a great many opinions but, taken together, these did not add up to a point of view.

Opinions are most impressive, of course, when backed up with vast quantities of information. Yet, when one does accrue a fair amount of information, someone is almost certain to come along with even more. The hotter the subject, the more intense the controversy, the greater the amount of information available. Take the four great American political controversies of the twentieth century: the Sacco-Vanzetti case, the Rosenberg spy trial, the Hiss-Chambers case, and the Kennedy assassination. To have all the information available on these controversies, so that one can arrive at the most reasoned opinion, would take just a little longer than a longish lifetime. To study any of them in anything like full detail is to step into the big muddy with Ferragamo loafers—just not a sensible move. The truth, it is said, will set you free, but, pursued with the ardor some matters require, it can cause you to miss dinner and many a pleasant evening afterward. Most people, I suspect, must do what I do: hold, on most matters of genuine controversy, an opinion based less on solid information than on hunch, temperament, and one's general politics and point of view.

At the precise time that our age is going bonkers for more and more information, with people talking confidently of "the information society" and "the knowledge economy of the twenty-first century," with all the chatter about fiber-optic cables, direct broadcast satellites, digital technology, video E-mail, and the rest, I find myself longing for rather less information. Why do I have to know the politics of Michael Lerner—or even who Michael Lerner is? Why do I have to know that the golfer Greg Norman's sobriquet is "the White Shark"? I am pleased not to know what quantity is contained in the unit of a "ball" of cocaine. I am pleased—proud even—never to have heard Howard Stern or Don Imus on the radio, but I'm a little sad to have to admit that I know who they are. I'd rather be as ignorant of them as I am of Beavis and Butthead. I am, again, pleased not to know what "lap dancing" is—and I shall make a concerted effort not to find out. I feel no sorrow at my ignorance of whole subcultures. Plenty of time to learn them, I figure, in the next life.

Instant information and instant communication—these are among the goals of the current age. I not long ago had a letter from a man who, on his letterhead, listed, along with his address, three phone numbers (home, office, and car), two fax numbers, and his E-mail code. When I saw that great jumble of numbers, I said to myself, "The hell with it. This guy's altogether too easy to get in touch with. I'm not going to answer his letter." I eventually did answer it, though, and not long after, I met him. Sorry to report, he turned out to be an amiable fellow. How much less complicated life would be if you could judge a man by his letterhead!

The states or conditions or degrees of informedness, I have concluded, are four: being well-informed, being knowledgeable, being hip, and being cultivated. An example of someone well-informed might be a television newsman in the upper reaches—a Sam Donaldson, say, or a Cokie Roberts—someone who chats away about the news for a living and for whom knowing who voted how on health care or on defense spending is more important than knowing the names of the books of the Bible or when Proust died or who Poulenc was. Being well-informed suggests, at least to me, people mired in the news whose outlook and limits are bounded physically by the Washington Beltway and chronologically by the last ten years. They may have bits of historical knowledge, but they are really defined by the up-to-the-moment. *Au courant* and all current, the well-informed live almost wholly in the Now.

The knowledgeable are more wide-ranging in their information. Although often in possession of information about the Now, they know a vast deal about the Then. They are not

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usually specialized in what they know. If 1950s quiz shows hadn't all been fixed, one could cite their contestants as perfect examples of the knowledgeable. A knowledgeable person could, I suppose, tell you who led the final sacking of Constantinople in 1453, who won the Preakness in 1926, and whence tarragon derives.

I recently had a student of remarkable knowledgeability, a refreshment in an age when professors are wont to claim that the young have no historical knowledge. This young man has a wonderfully absorbent mind and an attractive manner of mastering the factual substance of any subject that interests him. He knows baseball, the Arab world, an impressive amount about serious music, much history, and so many other things that when he didn't know a discrete fact I felt slightly amazed, as if I had found a flaw in an almanac or encyclopedia of good repute. I was not surprised to learn that he had been a member of his quite good high school's—St. Albans' in Washington, D.C.—quiz bowl team.

Knowledgeability, however, has its limits. It is chiefly, though not wholly, about facts, and the world's facts are simply too many for even the most absorbent brain to retain. During the investigation of cheating on quiz shows, one of the producers of a 1950s quiz show called *Dotto* told an attorney from the New York District Attorney's office that, given the range of factual knowledge, nobody could be expected to answer more than two of any ten randomly asked questions. "You cannot ask random questions of people and have a show," he declared. "You simply have failure, failure, failure, and that does not make for entertainment." That is perhaps the best explanation, though no justification, for the fixing of those quiz shows, and contained within it is a description of the natural limits of knowledgeability.

If to be informed is to know about the Now, and to be knowledgeable is to know about the Then, to be hip is to know about what's going on in those lively waters outside the boring mainstream, where life is reputedly lived with the intensity it merits. The truly hip would find much that interests the informed and the knowledgeable more than a little beside the point. The hip think of themselves as blasting through the façade of quotidian life to discover what is going on in the inner rooms. The hip man or woman is an avant-gardist of information: he or she knows what's happening—and feels that what's happening is the only thing genuinely worth knowing.

I have known people—all have been men—who prided themselves on their hipness, but one friend in particular went, I think it fair to say, hip full-time. I first met Al in New York. He had written a Ph.D. dissertation about plagiarism in Thomas De Quincey, and he taught in the School of General Studies at Columbia, which he always referred to, in good, amusing hip fashion, as "working the lounge at Columbia." He was the first person I knew who, having had the talent to be either, preferred being hip to being learned.

Like many who pride themselves on their hipness, Al knew an extraordinary amount about jazz—with a special interest in its more out-on-the-edge aspects: the barbaric appetites of Charlie Parker, the elegant viciousness of Miles Davis—and he wrote about it in rather febrile prose. He had been in psychoanalysis—in those days itself still something of an advance-guard activity—which was one source of his humor. This humor featured many jokes about repression, or, more precisely, about cutting loose from repression. "Could you lower the lights, bring me a paper cup and a towel, and turn on Peggy Lee singing 'Fever'?" he once asked me when he sat down to read his own galley proofs at a magazine where I worked.

Al's great moment came when he discovered the comedian Lenny Bruce. He eventually wrote a substantial tome, a work of 565 pages, about him. Like Charlie Parker and Miles Davis, Lenny Bruce was another of Al's heroic anti-repressors. Bruce's speciality, as Al argued in an early article he wrote about him, was to serve as a shaman of sorts by breaking taboos—of decorous speech, of false sentiment—that the rest of us were apparently too timid to confront. In this, Lenny Bruce was the hippest of the hip, telling the truths that we all knew—about sex, religion, drugs—but were too uptight (a word not yet familiar), too frozen with fright, to admit. Al became something of a Bruce hanger-on, and my guess is that, as a frustrated comedian himself whose only stage was "the lounge" at Columbia, he would have traded places with Lenny Bruce without hesitation, except for the squalor of the comedian's drug-laden life.

Al later wrote thick books about Elvis and

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John Lennon—books underwritten, it was said, by million-dollar advances. The John Lennon book was an international best-seller, whose revelations angered a great many people. (I once heard, on television, the rock singer Elton John, in reaction to the John Lennon book, call Al "human vermin," which is certainly a long way from the kind of response his work on plagiarism in De Quincey received.) Al died of a heart attack in his middle sixties, but had he lived longer, I don't doubt he would have written a book about Michael Jackson; for what interested him most seemed to be the investigation of the world of popular culture figures, behind which he found, as the very hip are inclined to do, drugs, strange sexual practices, disorder, and early sorrow.

I'm afraid I make an old friend sound rather a creep. Al wasn't. He had, in fact, beneath all his relentless hipness, a kind of natural refinement and charm. With his receding hairline, his mustache (later shaved off), his small wire-rimmed glasses, his scholar's stoop, his good if sometimes excessively modish clothes, he resembled S. J. Perelman, but a sexier, hipper, much flippier S. J. Perelman. We didn't keep in regular touch, and, after I moved from New York, years would go by without our meeting. But whenever I saw him, I found myself pleased to be in his company.

Al was never boring, and he had a lovely, snorting adenoidal laugh, which, when I could, I enjoyed invoking. I never read his Elvis or John Lennon books—friendship, after all, has its limits. I used to think his condition inherently a little sad: being hip, molding an entire personality out of one's hipness, appeared to me more than a touch unseemly for a man of a certain age. The only people I know who can bring off hipness past the age of fifty are the older black jazz musicians; it's almost always a mistake for white guys to attempt it.

When Al was working on his Lenny Bruce book, he asked me, as a favor, to do a bit of "research" for him—remember when that was a real word, something scientists did in laboratories? Could I find a few hours to interview a druggist in Chicago who was known to have supplied Lenny Bruce with lots of drugs when he played The Gate of Horn and other Chicago nightclubs? I agreed and met the druggist, who was absolutely forthcoming not only about Lenny Bruce but about other comedians, musicians, and singers whom he supplied with an impressive range of drugs. They used to take these drugs at his house near Rush Street, then Chicago's chief nightclub center. "In those days, we used to call the house," he said with a prideful smile, "the shooting gallery." For three hours or so, this man rattled on and on, and here I was, for the first and only time in my life, in possession of inside, altogether hippish information about all these show-business characters. The thrill, I have to report, just wasn't there.

One could, I suppose, be informed, knowledgeable, and hip all at once—though clogging one's mind with much useless information would be a terrible strain—but no one could be all three things and cultivated into the bargain. To be cultivated is, of the four possibilities, the most desirable. I have had a few friends who have achieved this elevated status. The cultivated not only know a great deal but, more important, they know what is significant—they know, not to put too fine a point on it, what is really worth knowing.

Part of being a cultivated person is knowing what to forget. Gertrude Stein recorded the happy moment when she realized she couldn't read all the books in the world. The truly cultivated person realizes that he probably hasn't a chance to read even all the good books in the world. He knows the mind is best not used as a sponge, ready to soak up everything that falls on the counter. The names David Koresh, Kimba Wood, and Webster Hubbell, he would know instinctively, are not for storage and retrieval. The cultivated person is good at the art of extrapolation: at imagining the unknown on the evidence of the known. He has a strong historical sense, so that he tends to be less impressed by the crisis of the week that agitates the news media, which they in turn use to agitate the rest of us. From his historical sense, he knows that this caravan has passed before, and that another, not very different one will pass through next week and another the week after that. The cultivated person is interested in information that either has been around for a while or will probably be around in the future. He is also likely to possess knowledge that goes a step or two deeper down than that which ordinary, decently educated people have.

My late friend Arnaldo was not merely cultivated, he was immensely erudite—the most learned man I expect ever to know—but his

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impressive cultivation made the erudition all the more striking. As someone who had been forced by the fascists to depart his native Italy, as someone who had lost family in Hitler's death camps, Arnaldo knew politics was serious business. Yet I rarely heard him talk "politics" in the mundane sense of elections, or personalities, or changing governments. He seemed to know the darker side of politics—its tendency to get under people's skin to affect their fairness, decency, and honor.

Although there was not a hint of one-upmanship about him, Arnaldo made one feel the poverty of one's own knowledge. It had taken me many years to become just shallowly conversant about such names as Lampedusa, Fokine, and Simmel, yet Arnaldo, a great scholar of the ancient world, not only knew more about these figures than I, but had an intellectual archaeology that went much deeper in every regard. Where I was still digging away at Troy III, he was already at Troy VIII. In conversation, he might make casual mention of, say, the founder of Romanian folklore. He knew an immense amount about Edward and Constance Garnett. Once, at the University of Chicago, I was having breakfast with Leon Edel, who was then setting out to write a book about Bloomsbury. Arnaldo joined us and spoke with such astonishing penetration about the importance to the Bloomsbury group of Duncan Grant that a stranger, freshly arrived at our table, might have thought that Arnaldo had just completed a book about Bloomsbury. If there had been a parlor game called Serious Pursuit, Arnaldo would have been its champion.

I sometimes think God not a very good economist in allowing people such as Arnaldo to die, because with his death all that information not set out in his books simply—poof!—disappears. No one will need to make the same charge against God at my demise. The information stored in my mind is neither so interesting nor so carefully stored as Arnaldo's. Often I will recall what seems to me an interesting point, insight, or observation, but I won't be able to recall where I read it, even though I am confident I read it only a day or so before. This comes, I suspect, from too much desultory reading.

Elizabeth Bishop, the poet, herself a steady reader, felt likewise. In a letter written from her redoubt in Brazil to her friend Pearl Kazin, she wrote: "And—oh well, we read and read and read, all the time, and the books pile up, and I remember a little here and there, and the magazines are snowing us under . . . and what good it all does drifting around in this aging brain I don't know." Miss Bishop was ten years younger than I when she wrote that. But concern about what the mind retains, what the endless acquisition of information all comes down to, had long been much on her mind. As early as 1937, when she was only twenty-six, she wrote a strange little story, "The Sea & Its Shore," about a man hired to pick up scraps from a beach who finds himself reading everything he picks up. He divides his reading, or studies as he calls it, into three categories: things that related to himself; things about people who had caught his fancy; and things he couldn't understand at all that interested him nonetheless. The story also contains the following amusing passage: "This was the type of warning that worried him: 'the habit of perusing periodical works may properly be added to Averrhoe's catalogue of ANTI-MNEMONICS, or weakeners of the memory.'"

Am I suffering an information overload by reading too many magazines? Mightn't I simplify somewhat my intellectual life by dropping my subscriptions to *Esquire*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Gentlemen's Quarterly*? Why do I read them in the first place? Do I really need to know more—or anything at all, really—about Strobe Talbott or Liam Neeson? You are reading the words of a man who actually took an hour out of his life to read an interview by Norman Mailer of Madonna. If any lingering respect you might have had for me has vanished and you wish to stop reading me here, I shall of course quite understand.

I read these magazines in the first place—there is no second place—in the hope that in doing so I shall keep up with some of the things that preoccupy the culture in its wider, sometimes more youthful, often wildly excessive aspects. I tell myself I do so because it is the duty of a writer to try to grasp the unique quality of his time and make sense of it. I see movies—never at full price, but on videotapes—such as Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* or Oliver Stone's *JFK*, whose politics present no surprises, in the hope of understanding why so many contemporary intellectuals continue to be so pleased by the predictable. Somehow, I cannot take the awfulness of these things

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on faith; I must look into them on my own.

For largely the same reasons, I continue to read a modest number of new novelists. The novel, as the old cliché has it, brings the news, or at least it used to. I take pleasure in reading well-made stories, but I also read new novels in anticipation of learning about shifts in sensibility. I know I am likely to get news of this sort of thing late, but I don't want to miss out on it altogether. I read the last two novels of Louis Begley, for example, to bring myself up to date on current snobberies. These novels brought me lots of information on clothes, food, real estate, fancy fornication (I seem to have forgotten their larger themes or messages). The only question is, what am I supposed to do with this information?

The other day I was talking with a friend, a former *New Yorker* writer, who told me that his contract at that magazine had not been renewed under its new editor. "Your problem," I found myself saying in reaction to his not entirely surprising news, "is that your writing for that magazine was merely interesting." The "merely interesting" seems, for the moment, to have had it, not only at *The New Yorker* but elsewhere in the culture. The enormous changes that Tina Brown has made at *The New Yorker* have to do not only with connecting nearly everything in the magazine to sex, social status, and politics, but with putting an end to a leisurely literary culture that still obtained under her predecessors.

Be brief, be blunt, and be gone—the rules that used to apply to Catholic confession—are increasingly the rules of journalism. Keep the information moving—and move it does. With so much loose information flying around, information must now come tidily packaged and is most sought after when labeled "inside." The appetite for inside information, stoked beyond all previous imagining by technological invention, continues to grow. I was recently at a meeting where an after-dinner speaker said that he was going to reveal the results of a *Los Angeles Times-Mirror* poll on American public opinion that wouldn't be officially released until 4:00 the following afternoon. I looked at my watch. It was 8:30 P.M. I and my fellow diners had a seventeen-and-a-half-hour scoop. One could feel the little *frisson* afforded by our little advantage go shivering through the room. So elated was I at being one of the recipients of this scoop that I nearly forgot that I didn't care about the poll and that I enjoy few journalistic moments better than when pollsters are proved dead wrong.

Still, I am as vulnerable to being in on inside information as the next chump. I cannot resist checking the *National Enquirer* and the rest of the grocery press—America's very own gutter press—as I go through the check-out line at supermarkets. The *National Enquirer* seems to be particularly good at informing its readers about who has cancer or AIDS, which gives one a macabre little jump on the obituary page; the paper must have informants in hospitals who supply them with this information. Such allure as the novels of John Gregory Dunne have seems to me built on the prospect of his supplying insider information: about politicians, priests, and the culture of Hollywood. In a recent novel, Dunne remarks that screenwriters are contemptuous of writers of books. Is this true? Assuming that it is, what does it profit me to know it? Nothing, except perhaps it gives me possession of yet another tidbit of insider information.

Information, I am certain, isn't wisdom, but is it even, in most cases, knowledge? My reaction to the Sunday *New York Times*, all three or four pounds of it, is sheer depression. The only thing about it that cheers me up is that I don't have to help produce all this bumf. When young, I would have loved to have been a newspaper reporter, which I thought excellent training for a writer, as the careers of Stephen Crane, Dreiser, Hemingway, and Willa Cather all attest. But nowadays working on a newspaper, each day weighting down the information stone for poor, hopeless Sisyphus, seems to me simply hell. It's bad enough to have to wade through all this information, deciding which of it to ignore; to be actually responsible for supplying some of it seems even worse.

Yet, when one hears all the talk about the information superhighway and the rest of it, one gathers that large numbers of people long for not less but even more information and want it coming in quicker than ever before. I, for my part, would rather it were all slowed down. Of course, I am someone who is still being dragged into the twentieth century and am far from ready for the twenty-first. Car phones, VCRs, personal computers—I fought them all and I now own and use them all. I am still fighting getting a fax, though I have used

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other people's fax machines a fair amount. When people ask me for my own fax number, I generally say that I haven't a fax machine but intend to get one as soon as my telephone implant is completed. More often than not, people neither laugh nor ask me what I mean.

The assumption of the new information society seems to be that more is better. I find that more information tends only to weigh more heavily on me. That part of information known as the news has long ago begun to pall; the following headlines from a recent daily edition of the *New York Times* may, technically, be information, but I'm far from clear about the purposes to which they might be put: "Peace Once Again Vanishes in Sarajevo," "Japan Opens AIDS Forum," "A Catholic Mother of 5 Children Is Shot Dead in Northern Ireland," "Rwandan Doctor's Journey Through Horror and Death." Local television news, at least in my city, is all heartbreaking, anxiety making, and nightmarish: stories of child abuse, juvenile gangs, murder, and rape. This, too, I guess, is information.

Living in Italy and writing in the eighteenth century, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who wrote such splendid letters, would wait for as long as five months for information about her family in England. Such was the slowness of the mails in Europe, and in time of war they were even worse. Lady Mary was a woman of towering curiosity, and it must have pained her to wait so long to receive quite vital personal information, but there was nothing for it. Apart from letters from her daughter and a small number of friends, she learned about English life from novels, not all of them first-class novels, either. Writing to her friend Sir James Steuart, Lady Mary remarked: "It is true a very small proportion of knowledge is allowed us in this world, few truths permitted, but those truths are plain; they may be overseen or artfully obscured from our sight, but when pointed out to us it is impossible to resist the conviction that accompanies them."

Henry James filled in the blanks left by Lady Mary here, when, in *The Princess Casamassima*, he wrote: "The figures on the chessboard were still the passions and jealousies and superstitions and stupidities of man, and thus positioned with regard to each other at any given moment could be of interest only to the grim invisible fates who played the game—who sat, through the ages, bow-backed over the table." That, folks, remains the news, though I don't think Dan Rather likely to read it some Wednesday evening at 6:30, EST.

Plowed under by too much information, I have, from time to time, felt that I had all the information I could use just now, thank you very much. If there is a minor malady called information fatigue, I know I have it. Not long ago I picked up one of the monthly magazines I subscribe to, and, scanning its table of contents, I discovered I didn't give a rat's rump about people serving prison time for smoking marijuana, or the sex bias in medicine, or why good olive oil costs so much, or why Islamic government may be in the future for a number of Middle Eastern countries, or why tourists in Russia manage to have fun there despite the absence of amenities. The only piece in the entire magazine I thought I might read was one on pool hustlers, but, somehow, I never got around to it.

With the information revolution closing in, I ask myself whether it isn't possible to live deeper down, at some more genuine, less superficial level of life than that promised by an endless flow of still more and then yet again even more information. It has taken me a good while to understand this, but it turns out that the only information I am seriously interested in is that about the human heart, and this I cannot find any easy way to access, not even with the best of modems, fiber-optic cable, or digital technology. Pity, though, to have to miss out on another revolution.

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America and Its Discontents

A Great Society Legacy

LILIAN AND OSCAR HANDLIN

CONTENTMENT NEVER SEEMED COMPATIBLE with the American condition. In the seventeenth as in the twentieth centuries, discontent with a present deemed inadequate set restless people in motion, scrambling to better themselves. Happiness ever pursued, rarely attained, goaded on the aggrieved. Hence, at first view, the petulance infusing public discourse in the 1990s seemed no different from that in any other decade.

Yet the pervasive sense of unhappiness in our country at present is out of accord with a generally benign social context. Now that the Cold War has ended, the United States remains the world's sole superpower. A thriving economy, a steadily expanding employed labor force, and a rising life expectancy should sustain a general sense of well being. Instead, bitter struggles for advantage divide citizens. And laws designed to resolve conflicts only stoke the flames. The Americans with Disabilities Act compels a college to award a football player paralyzed from the waist down an athletic scholarship and to adapt its athletic activities to accommodate the "differently abled." The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission forbids a restaurant to seek "young" waiters lest that discriminate against the elderly. In a Smithsonian television program, the curator of the National Museum of Natural History lauds a New Guinea tribe that ate women who stole bananas as an appropriate model for the United States. Poor brainwashed Americans unable to overcome millenia of ingrained Eurocentric prejudices failed to understand that cannibalism, far from mere repugnant violence, provided the model for a complete, well-functioning criminal justice system. In this contribution to consciousness-raising, the Smithsonian thus joins the most

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recent Whitney Museum Biennial's mobilization of activist art on the side of the angels in cheap sloganeering masquerading as higher wisdom. The general assault on the United States mocked the millions of men and women everywhere around the world who would happily trade in their quaint customs for a share in America's better way of life.

Meanwhile, universities formulate Statements on Diversity that affirm "a strong belief in both equal opportunity and affirmative action" for blacks; multicultural councils encourage separate living quarters, ethnic theme halls, and indoctrination workshops; and "classroom climate advisers" seek to counterbalance an environment hostile to women and minorities. The old academic hiring process that reflected the traditional notion of using people's talents regardless of race or national origin is deemed not merely inadequate but manifestly wrong. Correction demanded an expansion of previous limited definitions of equality, excellence, and merit to include other vital though less measurable attributes, such as empathy and identification with students of diverse origins.

The disorientation that followed these radical changes altered everyone's life chances, while leaving those who gained as well as those who lost confused and uncertain. A giant anxiety-producing and media-managed industry fed the sense of unease and alarm by insistent warnings against ubiquitous dangers, whether from eating too much meat or apples sprayed with pesticide, whether from unsafe drinking water or radon-infested basements, whether from schools that discriminated against girls or law offices unsafe for female partners and clients, whether from playground death traps, from toys that maimed, or cosmetics tested on sacrificed animals. Danger lurked everywhere, and not least in the home. Since patriarchy thrived on violence, the most hazardous moments in women's lives occurred in private, in the company of husbands or lovers, according to radically changed definitions of rape.

Consider such grotesques among the unintended progeny of the Great Society, that prodigious effort to remake the United States in the 1960s, when Depression-generated anxieties had subsided and an expanding economy realigned productive forces to yield previously undreamed of affluence. Abundance then dispelled the specter of want and evoked the vision of a Great Society able to satisfy the wishes of all by fulfilling the promises of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal and Harry Truman's Fair Deal.

Depression and wartime upheavals had left the traditional verbal definitions of American liberty largely intact. But New Deal attempts

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to remedy the social shortcomings of capitalism, to create a more equitable society, and to forestall more drastic changes altered citizens' capacity to act in unforeseen ways. In 1944, Roosevelt had enunciated a second Bill of Rights, promising security to all—by which he meant jobs and adequate earnings, decent prices for farmers, and profits for business, along with homes, medical care, education, and universal protection against old age, accidents, and unemployment. Although the implementation of these newly minted rights remained a long way off—as did their definition—their evocation more than ever before thrust upon Americans responsibility for one another through the vast power of the polity. The New Deal augmented bureaucratic controls that increased the size and cost of governments as well as their intrusiveness. A radical extension of state services also preempted tasks once performed by voluntary groups, which, the Depression proved, could not meet the demands of modern life. Government bureaus guided by administrative law replaced the inadequate old communal methods with results that affected the whole society. Much of the former clannishness, localism, and ethnocentrism thereby went out of American life. The growing homogeneity that undermined regional variations and cast the country into a more uniform mold enhanced many people's liberty, despite the formidable limitations of modern industrial existence.

The New Deal also witnessed an early ethnic revival that released the definitions of American liberty from their Anglo Saxon mooring to encompass ever wider population segments. A new spirit of inclusiveness encouraged diverse groups to square their cultural heritages with the requirements of the larger society. Much of the provincialism and some of the intolerance once characteristic of American life thereupon evaporated. The corresponding redefinitions of liberty occasioned by these adjustments nevertheless proceeded within the familiar bounds of the rights of citizenship—equality before the law and equality of opportunity, concepts evolved out of America's past. Socially and culturally, the United States became more open and pluralistic. The political system validated these developments by bestowing numerous new benefits on citizens previously outside the scope of government service.

But large numbers remained less well off than others. Persistent racial prejudices impeded unifying tendencies and were directed not only against blacks but against other groups as well, with Asians among the more dramatic victims. Bias hampered also the Indian tribes, which were poorly off in spite of a century's effort at integration. Black political powerlessness and variants of Jim Crow discrimination, widespread violations of civil rights, wretched living condi-

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tions, education, and health facilities all circumscribed the ability of some people to share the benefits of liberty—the more glaring in the 1940s, when the country fought overseas for ideals unimplemented at home.

For the time being, the countervailing pulls of Americanism papered over these contradictions. Liberty, an ideological construct subscribed to by most people in 1950, conflicted neither with private identity nor with broader social needs. Though the temptation to seek refuge in tribalism remained, most people avoided a clear-cut choice in the belief that they could have both unity and separateness, that they could sustain both their American and their ethnic identities. In a Boston Common pageant, Chinese, Italian, Irish, Jewish, African American, Russian, and Syrian singers performed in harmony, revealing the nation's multi-racial composition, which was neither fragmented into discrete entities nor totally homogeneous.

Waning intellectual support for racism, the New Deal's emphasis on equality of opportunity and on experimentation, the spread of education, and after 1940 the revival of social mobility survived the Second World War and sustained the faith that civilization and liberty could coexist with democracy in a modern mass society, that diverse races could live together while retaining their authentic identities. They would find unity in diversity if they could but imbue their political relationships with social justice as the New Deal promised. The overwhelming economic influence of the war, which fueled recovery, enabled the United States to do so.

All critical indices remained favorable after 1960. Rising life expectancy and shrinking income inequalities as well as declining infant mortality created a favorable setting. Americans ceased to regard scarcity as humanity's inescapable lot. The new frame of mind encouraged high and ever-expanding mass consumption, stoked by incessant advertising and by ever more elaborate ways of satisfying diverse tastes. The more each person bought, the more everyone gained; the more choices, the greater the ability of each family to satisfy its true desires. But these material advantages clouded the once more sharply etched contours of liberty. As indebtedness mounted, the capacity to act diminished, yet the variety and number of available goods created the impression of ever greater freedom, increasingly defined in material terms. But the new prosperity also fostered greater social mobility, accompanied by a shift in values after 1960, away from prudent frugality toward easy open-handedness. Americans in greater numbers than ever before could look forward to ever higher living standards.

They reacted awkwardly, however, as a confusing expansion challenged inherited notions of freedom and rights, for they then con-

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fronted the inherent contradictions between their political egalitarianism and their private enterprise system, each realm operating according to its own values. The former asserted that all citizens participated in a process in which the "one man, one vote" formula assured all equality of results. The other promised only equality of opportunity, rewarding individuals according to their prudence, ability, luck, and skill, with equality of results improbable.

The economic upsurge after the war left some socially mobile people better off financially than ever before, strengthening the core values credited with fostering growth. The intellectuals, who argued fatuously that living standards for everyone were slipping, ignored the evidences of prosperity around them. The changing orientation in the labor force also reflected confidence in growth; the decline of unionism revealed the stronger position of the individual worker and the renewed emphasis on the values that stressed personal success as a measure of the capacity to act—that is, of liberty. Rising military budgets and increased welfare spending supplemented the private demand for goods and services. Although legislation more often directed the use and distribution of wealth and income, the overriding justification remained private property, a free market, and personal liberty, the basic elements of the American enterprise system. Government intervention broadened the base and increased the growth of the private sector so that potential conflicts between expanding central authority and personal liberty remained unobtrusive.

Always more egalitarian in politics than in economics, Americans affirmed radical equality in government while tolerating inequality of fortunes. The democratic device of universal suffrage did not destroy but ignored economic classes. However, the outpouring of goods left untouched the tension between political and economic equality, a tension Americans willingly accepted, having learned that government intervention under New Deal technocrats failed meaningfully to reduce inequalities.

Fears about the possibly deleterious effects of these developments on freedom proved unfounded. Ever larger concentrations of power in government and business, reform lobbies and pressure groups threatened individuals and were expected to induce conformity and acquiescence. Furthermore, the vast expansion of uniform and ever-lengthening formal schooling, mass print and TV journalism was supposed to smother the sense of independence, self-motivation, and initiative and make mediocrity the accepted standard. Yet, in spite of occasional breakdowns, the integrity of the nation's democratic and libertarian values remained intact, as the rapid rise and fall of Senator Joseph McCarthy demonstrated. That episode, whose importance to

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intellectuals and academics far outweighed its general impact, occurred amidst the difficulties of the Korean War, the strange nature of the Communist threat, the political commotions caused by the dismissal of General Douglas McArthur, and widespread frustration over unresolved political and social issues. By the end of the 1950s, the anxieties that animated the phenomenon of McCarthyism subsided, drowning in the rising tide of abundance.

Abundance also revived the wish to do good, an ever-present feature of the national character. Affluence permitted ample indulgence in benevolence, whether through government or voluntary agencies, and hinted at expanding liberty in all aspects of life, in accord with Roosevelt's promise in 1944. As in the past, historical circumstances shaped the particular benevolent impulses generated in response to affluence. The forms they acquired in the 1960s thus reflected the conventional wisdoms of the hour, articulated by industrious academics, think tanks, charitable foundations, and a host of private and governmental agencies dedicated to churning out ever larger volumes of social data and proposals for action. The enormous social readjustments entailed by the implementation of their conclusions surfaced only later.

The Great Society aimed to fulfill the expectations of 1944, to guarantee to all a life free of want, to afford everyone liberty, and to end internal divisions by eliminating racial injustice, improving the urban environment, beautifying the countryside, controlling pollution, and advancing education. The programs' architects assumed an underlying social and political consensus on definitions of the common good. Since every deficiency had a social origin, citizens needed only to ask, in the words of President Lyndon B. Johnson, "Where have we gone wrong?" then act to correct the error. All protests by definition became legitimate, each the expression of a righteous cause.

That these visions made individuals merely puppets of forces beyond control bothered the Great Society's planners not at all. They expected to provide for the poor and spread the ability to consume to everyone, without sacrifice by anyone. A vast legislative program aimed, by state action, to guarantee for all life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Great Society therefore required greater governmental involvement in the management of everyday life and reflected the spreading popularity of a social outlook that asserted the primacy of the public over the private sphere, with the result of bringing ever more areas into the scope of government action. Tightening the limits on citizens' capacity to act narrowed the scope beyond which their freedoms might harm others. Hence the growth of

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the federal bureaucracy, which swelled from 1,960,000 in 1950 to 2,981,000 by 1970, and the vast increase in intrusive government regulations.

The expectations aroused by the Great Society also fostered impatience fueled by contemporary manifestations of millenialist strains ever-present in the subsurface of national ideology. Harnessing the system to make it work for laudible objectives proved laborious in a country where many citizens did not share goals that social reformers approved. Influential segments of the public thereupon concluded that protests outside politics could accomplish more than protests within it. That awareness helped undermine government by consent, which acquired a novel meaning when it confronted a variety of blackmails that affected everyone's capacity to act.

Faith in government thereupon declined, ironically, as more people became dependent on it. Anti-authoritarian trends undermined the validity of both planners and plans, as well as the legitimacy of their means of implementation. The structure of civility, on which everyone's freedom ultimately depended, collapsed—one among the victims of these trends. The relentless intrusion of violence into many aspects of life, the decriminalization of behaviors once deemed deviant, the delegitimization campaigns ostensibly in the name of liberty undermined community structures and diminished citizens' capacity to act.

The bewildered, lacking anchors in family or mediating institutions, agonized in confusion. Some tuned out reality with the help of their Walkman and plugged into a private world of music that obliterated the surrounding squalor. The more articulate consoled themselves by assuming they had a monopoly on compassion and goodness and labeled their critics simply mean. Other disappointed zealots took to jogging to relieve their stress or found refuge on the fringes of new millenialist movements, like extreme environmentalism.

Confusion about the meanings of liberty increased with the depiction of wanton destruction of property as a form of political protest—legitimate given the grievances of participants. As some rioted and others marched, the slogans still sounded good but not the price paid; for, increasingly, within the Great Society, reality pulverized individuals like shovelfuls of corn in a hammermill.

Social mobility and population shifts weakened old ties, loosened family connections, and left individuals more adrift than before. Kinship nevertheless paradoxically remained important in determining success by shaping readiness to adapt. But home life changed, as successful men left wives behind, stuck in suburban starting points,

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responsive readers for Betty Friedan. Failure also poisoned marital relations so that the rising rate of divorce reflected both newly articulated grievances and perennial restlessness, particularly damaging when communities became arrangements of convenience, ever less likely to encase men, women, and children permanently in mediating institutions that had formerly cushioned the shocks of unfamiliar social forces. Now people, unaided, suffered unprecedented pressures.

Unacknowledged anxieties crowded in, while shortcomings in every arena of life became evidence of social failings and undermined the legitimacy of institutions traditionally expected to handle such difficulties. Meanwhile advocates of further improvement failed to see how unhappy voters became. Citizens paid ever higher taxes and voted commendable programs into being; but problems only seemed to get worse. The assumption that people would live happily ever after once abundance papered over social inequalities proved wrong, especially when higher crime rates and riots exposed the failure of the Great Society programs.

En route to an anticipated millenium, some basic features of the American polity suffered blows from which it long failed to recover. The weakness of the two major parties, disarray in local and national governments, voter apathy and cynicism, low turnouts at elections, and widespread contempt for the political process all reflected the same trend. Unexpectedly, once-familiar controls ceased to function. As the bread and butter issues over which the nation had split in the 1930s became irrelevant, the focus of attention shifted from income redistribution to more elusive, more divisive values and mores.

In the end, the Great Society dream of benevolent control with equality its object never worked out. Efforts by three presidents—Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon—to map patterns of government action that would expand the liberties of all had unanticipated consequences. Nixon tried, with the help of thoughtful planners such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan, to widen the scope of liberty not by having government change people, which it had already failed to do, but by handing out money more generously, thus allowing the handicapped to lift themselves out of their misery. But the Family Assistance Plan met bitter opposition from spokesmen for clients who stood to lose, especially in states with generous welfare benefits. The more liberal Nixon's domestic proposals, the more opposition he met. For the Great Society also deepened the polarization between Middle America and the trendsetters sympathetic to the fringe.

The loftier the aspirations, the deeper the disillusion with the results, the more ominous the complaint—what was so great about

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the Great Society? Poverty did not vanish despite the vast sums lavished on its eradication. Activists bent on rectifying injustice abroad needed to look no further than the nation's inner cities for instances of human rights abuses, wanton murder, corruption and thuggery, poverty, neglect, and misery. Slums spread as abandoned buildings blighted urban areas, focal points for drug dealing and crime. A deepening underclass expanded in size, its pathologies threatening to become permanent. Observers who lacked other means of accounting for the development linked it to the deprivation of an underprivileged minority defined by race. Yet the Great Society had made dramatic efforts to redress legitimate grievances, achieving more for civil and political rights in the decade of the 1960s than in the whole century after the Emancipation Proclamation. Meanwhile, those Americans clamoring for ever more regulations had forgotten Thomas Paine's description of government as the badge of lost innocence, a dangerous instrument whose ultimate reliance on coercion rather than on freely proferred loyalty and consent could easily take away what it had bestowed.

Scarcely noticed by the political engineers at the controls, the long-established goal of equality of opportunity shifted ominously to the novel goal of equality of results. The evident shortcomings of the Great Society programs encouraged bolder experimentation, including the utter rejection of the familiar view of American liberty by those bitter about its unequal distribution in society. Since equality of opportunity left some or many behind, government-enforced equality of results would finally make "equal" a realizable goal. And if that course circumscribed, or even eliminated, everyone's capacity to act—that is, lessened their liberty—that seemed a legitimate price to demand of citizens, whether they willed it or not. Laudable goals made all methods legitimate, even those that fundamentally subverted existing and obstructionist arrangements through extra-legal channels. That the legitimacy of law had emanated from its source in the will of the people, expressed by their representatives in a manner described by their constitution, mattered not at all. Nor did the old belief in government by the consent of the governed.

These challenges to the popular will had antecedents early in the century, when the growing need for expert knowledge cast doubts on voter competence to judge complex matters. After 1950 the concept of consent suffered further erosion from administrative bureaucrats and from an activist judiciary that stepped in when the political system seemed to mishandle moral dilemmas. New agencies like the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission acted ever more

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readily, competing for resources and attention against rival agencies eager to justify their existence by visible—that is, splashy—effects. Moreover, pressure groups in search of shortcuts to foist their agenda on everyone also assaulted the idea of consent, which put obstructive power in the hands of an inert majority. The academy churned out shocking reports and unsubstantiated statistics to demonstrate the alarming proportions of the latest social shortcoming in the hope of persuading the public that its self-appointed guardians, though rarely elected to public office, had its best interest at heart. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, popular consent seemed ever less relevant to the regulatory mechanisms of modern mass society.

Those who concluded that simple government neutrality would not remove the shackles that hampered some people's ability to act now set out to bend the political system to suit their agenda. They thereby put themselves in opposition to the nation's historical development—which bothered them little, since they deemed that past rotten to the core anyway. Textbooks and monographs proved that never in human history had so evil a country as the United States existed. Articles, symposia, conferences, and study groups, subsidized by taxpayer-financed grants, searched high and low for documentable instances of American depravity. And, where the evidence was hard to come by, deconstructed facts and figures were pressed into service to prove their point. However, the activist reformers failed to realize that competing fellow travelers, eager for their share of the pie, would soon enter the contest, all considering life a zero-sum game, in which the benefits of some had to come at the expense of others. In the struggle of each against all, group affiliation improved the chances of success. And if one group could change the rules of that game, so could others.

The superficial success of black tactics attracted imitators who discovered the advantages of minority status and victimhood as a means of expanding their own ability to act. In time, linguistic and ethnic groups, women, the elderly, and the disabled also sought the protection of civil rights legislation. Once the aggrieved had asked government and society to ignore differences of color, gender, religion, and antecedents, to treat everyone alike. Equality they then defined as the condition of lowered barriers, a fundamental component of individual dignity and basic to human liberty. But with equality transformed into a state of uniform outcomes, success pivoted on affiliation rather than on personal achievement, on tribalism rather than individualism. A major component of individual dignity thereupon disappeared. Deliberate misreadings of the Civil Rights Act after 1970 allowed interested parties to exploit Great Society legisla-

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tion to create ethnic groups where none had existed before.

The proponents of change thereby opted for a separatism that boded ill for the future of American liberty. Instead of working for a level playing field on which all contestants had some chance to win, prominent blacks, and after them other minorities, chose self-segregation, at first as a defensive response to the unwelcoming society around them, soon as a form of self-suffocation. Their bleak outlook premised a liberty tied to color and kin; people could only enlarge their capacity to act among their own kind. And a view originally articulated by a small minority within the civil rights movement, in the decades after 1970, became the self-destructive ethos of all who styled themselves progressives.

The drive for equality initially also fueled the women's movement, which had originally aimed to correct inequities in the civic status of females as mothers and career seekers. By the 1980s, reported increases in rape and in child abuse, incest cases and pornography offset gains from the ever greater equality of treatment between the sexes. Public interest humbugs produced ever more frightening statistics to justify their own occupations and also called for further government regulation. The more freedom women enjoyed, the worse off they seemed to be. Progressive reformers erroneously came to regard these pathologies as a backlash—reflecting men's unwillingness to recognize women's new status. But these and other deleterious developments turned out to be among the prices paid for liberation. Widespread serious side effects of the pill, the spread of AIDS (initially a male disease), looser sexual mores that sanctioned promiscuity and numerous lovers in fact shackled women more than ever. The concerted assault on the American family also shortchanged wives and mothers, who were often left to pick up the pieces of broken relationships, unwanted pregnancies, unruly children, and absentee fathers. Yet in the face of these deteriorating conditions, the idea of asking anyone to postpone gratifications or to aim for less egocentric goals remained taboo—another heritage of the Great Society and of the subsequent pursuit of equality of results.

No-fault divorce on demand fostered the unproven assumption that marriage as an institution had already proven a failure. Lawyers and judges, predisposed to believe that families oppressed women and damaged children, had heard the nuclear family described as "a microcosm of the fascist state, where the women and children are owned by, and their fates determined by, the needs of men, in a man's world." Out-of-wedlock motherhood thereupon became a sign of liberation, and offspring reared by same-sex couples were considered to be no worse off than those raised in more traditional alli-

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ances. The educated elites came to regard marital pathologies, formerly the lamented features of the culture of poverty, as badges of liberty. The much-maligned traditional domestic arrangements fostered dependency, aimed to limit entitlements, and made the fundamental error of relying on private responsibility. Furthermore, revisionist historians showed that these arrangements, always vastly over-rated, acquired their rosy hue as an invention of later reactionaries bent on stifling the progress of American womanhood. Only state coercion could offset human failings. Laws that rested on other assumptions, and particularly those that still regarded marriage as a defining characteristic of the family, had proven out-of-date and irrelevant.

Progressive thinkers maintained that delay in bringing the law into accord with modern mores countenanced greater abandonment, more family violence, and the recriminalization of behavior now mercifully free of any taint—such as adultery, which had become yet another human right, under the newest definitions of liberty. Advocates of further changes aimed to rein in the nuclear family were right in one respect—Americans indeed thought in terms of self-fulfillment and immediate gratification, to which keeping zippered up was an inconvenient obstacle. Professor Martha Albertson Fineman denounced as anachronistic institutions defined by "lifelong commitment and personal sacrifice," defended only by those harking back to a "mythical past." With philandering no longer accounted a strictly male prerogative—but an expression of an inherently just aspiration for equality and self-assertion—young women who demanded government assistance for the traditional tasks of nurturing and caretaking did not ask for special treatment but asserted rights. How "free" could she be as an African-American woman in a "genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world?" asked that embodiment of American unfreedom, Toni Morrison, an Ivy League professor and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Changes in vocabulary revealed the shift in polemic emphasis. The rights to which FDR had referred in 1944 became entitlements, adhering to particular groups, not to all people. And the aggrieved fought for them in a battle for empowerment; they did not persuade by reason. The goals therefore changed from the award of places by open, unprejudiced competition to the award of places as compensation for past injustices. Since competition for places between more or less equals in the past tended to reward whites, now by reverse discrimination, prizes went to blacks. Before long, moreover, schools and employers made room for the formerly underprivileged by affirmative action, the code word for quotas that the authors of the 1960s

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civil rights measures had explicitly rejected. As in primitive societies, the struggle for special privileges re-created inequalities.

Empowerment, ultimately anti-individualistic, depended on group strength. The number of adherents affected political elections and redistricting, the award of government contracts and university grants and admissions, access to housing and employment practices. Available entitlements encouraged further separateness and boundary delineation, however contrived, since allocations and benefits depended on group size. In the unabashed pursuit of advantage, the elderly, women, and the disabled joined a rainbow of ethnic groups. The general haste to discover and compensate presumed victims of past mistreatment encouraged new claimants to step forward. In resolving these contests, customary political tools failed, with the result that judges and administrators rather than legislators monopolized the decision-making process, circumventing limitations on the application of the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment which, color-blind like the Constitution, had treated only of individuals. Senator Hubert Humphrey had declared that the civil rights legislation he sponsored would not become a pretext for quotas or for the allocation of places among groups. After 1980, it did so. Hence the lurid fears that public and private power in the reformed state, sustained by technology, would shape an inhuman structure that would crush individuality. Hence also the sense that Washington operated according to rules of its own, violating the democratic process. By 1994, liberal and conservative pundits could agree on one point—the political system was a shambles, its tools outdated, its capacity to resolve disputes nil.

Equality mandated by the state entailed a loss of liberty for all. The consequences of discarding tests of competence mattered little when it came to jobs easily learned but mattered a great deal when it came to choosing neurosurgeons or the pilots of 747s. Then, too, the stress on being part of a self-defined entity demanded rigid codes of behavior and allegiance at a time when the dominant cultural values, at the center rather than at margins, stressed individualism, autonomy, and independence. People classified into fixed and artificial groupings defined by presumed ethnic injustices or by tacit admission that only thus could they get a share of American wealth, confronted painful identity problems. Color proved an undependable guide, given the long history of miscegenation and passing. Common language or ancestral nationality provided no help either. Constant comparisons with others reinforced feelings of insecurity, generating further compensatory efforts to make up for shortcomings

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through group pride. A capacity to act tied to identity would thereafter lend itself to "race norming"—measurement in terms of groupings, not of persons.

Ever more often people treated unequally came to consider themselves underprivileged minorities, denied their full measure of liberty, whatever their genetic or national antecedents. Those who believed their capacity to act circumscribed by external factors sought what they regarded as justifiable redress, available to them not as individuals but as members of a group even if self-defined. Thus the term "Hispanic" enfolded people as diverse as Puerto Ricans and Cubans and Mexicans and Colombians. The trend toward separateness, coupled with the demand for affirmative government action to remedy grievances, paralleled the breakdown of cohesive families and their networks of related associations, which no longer provided a secure emotional framework for daily life. Social pathologies unrelated to tribalist impulses thus fueled the fragmenting of American society. A wide variety of malfunctions—whether broken homes, sexual harrassment, or black youth unemployment—legitimized the quest for group identity. All the aggrieved expected government intervention on their behalf and in time acquired political power to secure it. The struggle permanently fixed the self-defined discrete minorities in the American population.

The varied meanings given the word *equality* reflected fundamental disagreements about basic priorities. Whose cry for help would the government answer first, given the restrictions on its resources? Were the needs of white, upper-middle-class and highly educated women really comparable to those of illiterate teenage mothers from the ghetto? And was the political system the forum in which to debate problems that had little to do with the classical definition of democratic government? Efforts to explain disparities that persisted after 1970 occupied the courts and legislatures as well as the legal profession, sociologists, psychologists, economists, and a vast array of other specialists, who transformed the struggles for equal citizenship and equal rights. Many policymakers thereafter ceased to regard equal opportunity as the measure of civil rights and instead depended on outcome as a test.

The impetus to this profound redefinition of the meaning of liberty came not only from the failure of existing programs to offset the effects of past discrimination but also from a clash between perceived needs and political realities. Desegregation, in time, came to require segregation, and integration as a goal yielded to identification by group. One person's gain then meant another's loss. Each expansion of community empowerment and control to help children learn re-

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quired appropriate role models, a demand plausible when voiced by Brownsville blacks but considered outrageous and proto-fascist when emanating from Irish-Americans in South Boston. To the argument that discrimination against whites was as unconstitutional as discrimination against blacks, Justice Thurgood Marshall replied, "You guys have been practicing discrimination for years. Now it is our turn." The Constitution had referred only to persons, not to groups. But neither its silence nor its color blindness presented an obstacle to the impulse to count by color and to assign places by ethnic identity.

The tactics of controversy soon thrust principle and consistency aside. Subtly, the boundaries of permissible behavior shifted while the ever-more intense sense of forces beyond control alleviated guilt and nurtured feelings of victimization. No one had any liberty; everyone was locked into a vast, terrifying anti-community, stripped of personal uniqueness, and reduced to a mere productive unit for a mass technological society. No one therefore bore responsibility—not for being fat, or for being a criminal, not for drug taking, alcoholism, child molestation, or drunk driving, not for the waning powers of old age, for deficiencies in physical strength or intellect, or for wandering attention that lowered grades in school. Husbands who abused their wives blamed feminism, which assaulted their self-esteem, while murderers claimed that childhood mistreatments or having eaten too many Twinkies made them strike out. Or else they pointed the finger at television, a favorite scapegoat for numerous pathologies for which no one assumed responsibility. Women who failed to get their way blamed a variety of backlashes, forms of sexual harrassment, or the effects of PMS. The blame fell not on evil or sin, but on cultural psychosis—on external forces that made individuals act as they did or else on spurious genes beyond rational control. Hence poor academic performances could perfectly well reflect low cultural self-esteem. Numerous other instances transformed private, personal, and individual difficulties into social grievances under the slogan The Personal Is Political. The results produced a crowded activist agenda that gave equal time to the trivial and the serious, often shortchanging the truly needy while those with voices screechy enough to attract attention basked in the spotlight.

To make black students feel good, universities and other educational institutions sanctioned their withdrawal from contacts with outsiders, stigmatizing those who socialized with whites as "Oreos" or "vanilla," just as parents who moved to white suburbs were told that they were betraying their selfhood and trying to pass for something they were not. A variety of "diversity task forces" mushroomed at institutions eager to broaden their offerings in the supermarket that

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the new consumer-oriented universities had become. The curriculum adapted to presumed needs by eliminating Shakespeare, Aristotle, and other dead white male pillars of Western Civilization or by now teaching them as representatives of a thoroughly corrupt Western tradition. Multicultural Afrocentric course studies, justified by pseudo-scholarly pretensions, instead traced the birth of philosophy to Africa, and the slave trade to European Jews. Perhaps the Greek thinkers did plagiarize from African works now lost; that would only increase the worth of Plato to black students as the only surviving trace of their antecedents. Instead, flimsy myths that evoked a burning sense of victimization left students utterly unprepared for the real world. Social scientists maintained that spending resources on getting blacks to live in white communities, rather than investing in black ones, was racist. Demands for political redistricting along color lines followed, along with more sophisticated calls to replace the one man, one vote formula with electoral devices in which the votes of some (mainly black) would count for more than those of others. Supporters of these measures expressed a sense of righteous indignation and incomprehension when their candidates proved too controversial for high political appointments.

Having come to regard prizes as entitlements of which others deprived them, many people felt cheated, and not altogether erroneously. By any comparative standard, the country after 1960 did well—better than at any other time in the twentieth century. Yet little incremental improvements seemed pitiful in light of the enormity of the problems. The culture of whining, long antedating the Great Society, and a response fostered by pseudo-scientists, instant experts, health professionals, soul quacks, and environmental fanatics, defined everyone as, to some degree, a victim, insensate but blameless. Ultimately the entire political system came under scrutiny; deemed antiquated, it evoked calls for government by referenda to allow people a greater voice in public affairs. The popularity of outsider politicians, of Washington bashing, and of attacks on a variety of elites and vested interests heightened the sense that American democracy in its current manifestations was obsolete.

Drug taking, an expensive habit, on the margin of legality, spread among the affluent with cash to spare and also among the poor with nothing to lose, all trapped by forces they deemed beyond control, eager for relief from unbearable burdens. Ironically, drug users felt liberated by subjugating themselves to chemical dependencies that turned them into nomads existing in a grotesque idyll of drifting through a mad, mad world. Meanwhile, the law learned to tolerate these deviances; forward-looking judges found "emanations" and

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"penumbras" coming from the Bill of Rights to support decisions that struck down restraints on personal behavior as well as censorship and even required defense of child pornographers. As skillful litigation enabled students, prisoners, women, the poor, gay, lesbians, the handicapped, and the mentally retarded to find their own voices, why should pedophiles lag behind?

An increasingly sensate culture elevated vague feelings and emotions over rationality as a guide to action and profoundly influenced judgments about equality. Reason, dismissed as mere camouflage for power relations, seemed a form of oppression no more legitimate than any other. Rational judgments, no more than one text among many, could be deconstructed like any laundry bill and deserved no preference over emotion as a guide to action. Nuanced arguments about cause and effect, about justice and purpose dissolved in passionate certainties about correct allocations of goods and places.

Before the decade of the 1960s ended, half a million people gathered at Woodstock for a counterculture anything-goes concert, innocent of sanitary facilities but symbolic of attitudes toward community values as would be the Chicago Seven trial a month later. The sense of freedom and exhilaration at Woodstock masked paranoia and anxiety. And as the days of rage fizzled out, the summer of love came to an end in a quest for new lifestyles. The mud in which torrential rains mired the new nation let participants revel in this sense of "the very primitive—precivilized, pastoral America before the white man came."

Yet such liberation did not bring relief, even when loosed inhibitions replaced burdensome restraints and obligations—not for women freed from the burden of unwanted pregnancies, not for men liberated from unwanted wives through easy divorce, not for anyone able to follow inclinations once deemed deviant. All these presumed extensions of the capacity to act proved but new restraints and sources of anxiety because they did not offer people what they really wanted—in fact, they only shackled people more. Bulimia, anorexia, and obesity responded to the overabundance of food and to its transformation into yet another substance ripe for abuse. People no longer ate to live, since they more often learned that to survive they should consume less. The very inability to decide on appropriate quantities also owed something to the altered social environment and to the loss of universally accepted moral values sustained by custom and religion. Though Metrecal advertisements urged diet to protect the American way of life and freedom, controlling one's food intake became a political issue. Animal rights activists and anti-beef advo-

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cates urged vegetarianism while feminists treated the anorexics as extreme examples of the difficulties encountered by women competing in the masculine world. Ever more people felt entrapped by their size as by almost everything else with which they were born. Turning inward upon one's body and obliterating the self through starvation became the ultimate liberation from the world's bondages. Grace Paley, a New York socialite, declared that "you can never be too rich or too thin," thus articulating an outlook that circumscribed people's choices as never before. Faced with an unprecedented availability of food, they learned that most of it was bad for them.

Then the steam went out of the Movement, not by opposition but by deflation; and the revolution congealed in a society tolerant or apathetic enough to accept both longhairs and shorthairs. "A conviction of decadence, the rotting of the West" seemed to Czeslaw Milosz "a permanent part of the equipment of enlightened and sensitive people for dealing with the horrors accompanying technological progress." That conviction also served as a backdrop for the continuing equality controversy; for it undermined the absolute standards by which Americans had once judged equality as they had right and wrong.

Commitments to equality then shifted emphasis within the traditional triad; life and liberty became less important than the pursuit of happiness, increasingly defined as an entitlement. But since happiness lacked a universal cash equivalent, Americans tended to understand it as the hedonistic gratification of whatever impulse moved them. The much-touted absence of restraints, which deprived men and women of guides to action, left them flapping in gusts of uncertainty. The new definition of liberty that placed individuals' rights above those of society and vastly expanded the scope of these rights showed its deleterious results in the next two decades. In that brave new world after 1970, while the rights pie grew enormously, assaults on the traditional family continued unabated. The varieties of legitimate sexual identifications grew and gender bending came into vogue, spurred by postmodernist deconstructions that aimed to blur antiquated, Western, Eurocentric genital sexuality. The stress on asceticism and voluntary poverty, on doing with less, remained influential mainly among people who had more than enough to begin with. Forms of happiness, once delineated according to centrist values, came to be associated with forms of behavior considered in the past beyond the bounds of polite society. Madonna set the tone in fashion and behavior.

The more articulate babbled about creating an anti-authoritarian society, comforted by anarchist revivals, life-style changes, and pas-

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sionate involvement in radical Christianity. The more bizarre concluded that modern American capitalist society was actually a near perfect expression of communism and took hope in the possibility of "small-scale resistance." Experiment became all the rage, guided by shifting sex roles and a variety of environmental activities, united by assaults on industrialism and capitalism, and fueled by anti-Americanism. Intellectuals who once busily praised China's Cultural Revolutionaries and the humanitarianism of Cambodia's butcherous Khmer Rouge shifted direction, and color, and turned from Red to Green. The even more bizarre viewed humans as a form of pollution, a planetary malignancy, and an ecotumor.

Do-it-yourself politics proliferated to such an extent as to nullify the effectiveness of any specific effort. With everyone encouraged "to make a difference," the results canceled each other out and equaled zero. Meanwhile the once-flourishing counterculture meccas reverted to what they had always been, blots on the landscape. Lifestyle revolts subsided into wood-burning stoves and alfalfa diets. But individual self-discovery left few comfortable with what they found. Though efforts to define the center by the margins rather than by the core brought greater tolerance and acceptance, radicals who hoped to liberate not only themselves but everyone else found fewer takers than they anticipated.

Worse, they failed to calculate the cost involved; the battles ultimately restricted everyone's liberty and scuttled all agendas, good and bad. Nor did they foresee the results of efforts to fragment the polity—the response to the Black Panther litany of black power for black people, red power for red people, yellow power for yellow people, and white power for white people, along with calls for greater government paternalism. The 1960s thus left an ambiguous legacy, and the battle over whether the positive or negative would ultimately prevail extended through the next quarter century.

After 1970, blacks and their imitators elevated victim status to an art form; insistence on prizes for all replaced the historic understanding of equality as a product of open competition. In the past, a free society assured members neither perfect equality of results nor perfect equality of opportunity. Individuals nevertheless bore responsibility for their own destinies, even though they lacked complete control over them. But after the Great Society reforms, the failures and their spokesmen lost confidence in the fairness of the course and asserted that the fault lay not in innate inabilities but in some tilt in the track. Once external conditions bore the blame for unequal outcomes, equal results became the true measure of the equality guaranteed by law. Minority demands for remedies shifted from negative to

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positive government action, from non-discrimination to affirmative preference, encouraged by flabby though fashionable redefinitions of justice, according to which true egalitarianism demanded benevolent rulers to even out differences and impose uniform standards for an utterly homogeneous population, elevating equality over efficiency as a social goal, even if less for everyone resulted. From that point of view, individual rights mattered little, nor did consent of the governed, since the majority would resist the sacrifices entailed. Bolder dreamers modeled the social order on monastic barracks and army camps, examples of total uniformity. In either case, liberty or the capacity to act became irrelevant.

Affirmative action aiming to expand freedom by making inroads on it augmented the trend to social balkanization, increased divisiveness, spread resentment among the disfavored, and, by privileging some, left the unprivileged seething. Furthermore, many judicial and administrative rulings violated the core theme of the American government, grounded for centuries on a procedural covenant, entered into for limited purposes. In discarding the shackles of tradition and precedent, citizens lost some of the positive fortifications that in the past had enabled their capacity to act to survive dramatic challenges.

Affirmative action in the 1980s acquired its own identity, independent of the often dubious boons to its beneficiaries. It became embodied in an ideology and also in a growing cadre of functionaries who policed its application to specific cases. Political careers built on a bleak vision of the future and power attained on the basis of outdated perceptions of reality would not readily yield when circumstances changed. The concern with victim and underdog papered over actual disdain for the wider implications of policies that rested on an anti-Americanism, directed against a rotten society ripe for subversion. Crusaders could not bother about cost-or-benefit assessment; guided by a vision of "them versus us," they insisted that morality was all on their side. Few dared acknowledge that blacks rarely gained, except when employed in enforcement. By the 1980s it was clear that the most disadvantaged failed to gain at all, for lethargic whites preferred to lower the bars for occasional underqualified individuals rather than struggle to educate a whole minority so that it could compete.

The aging radicals, still animated by their 1960s enthusiasms, also forgot that the antithesis of liberty was privilege, not inequality. The open society that Americans favored after 1750 held equality of opportunity essential and condemned unjustly derived advantages some enjoyed through brute force, discriminatory laws, or values that arbitrarily favored some over others. In the United States, the state his-

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torically had never been the private preserve of the few, exploited on their own behalf, no matter how many tried to make it so. Government always exercised power by the consent of the governed and, representing all citizens, could at least on the face of it never favor some at the expense of others.

The advocates of equality of results thus sought to restore to American society a paternalism largely discarded after 1750, although they now wished government to operate not on behalf of the powerful few, but of the supposedly powerless, many whose interest they defined. Hence the assault on all forms of consent that required majority agreement, hard to achieve when the prevailing ideology resisted artificial constraints upon the individual. Although few citizens swallowed it whole, the argument that American freedom was a white monopoly constructed from the beginning on the backs of enslaved blacks encouraged a preference for government by bureaucratic fiat, which obviated the need for popular support. A society in which coercion determined fundamental choices of everyday life left people unfree, even if well educated and fed, as were slaves whose masters cared prudently for their chattels. Most of the electorate, if not some of their chosen leaders, thereupon opted for freedom.

Since the political system proved impervious to radical assaults, enthusiasts sought salvation by way of education, where multiculturalism, neatly tailored to particular groups, would foster self-pride, confidence, an authentic voice, and an equality of outcomes of sort, rejecting the inauthentic white, Western, male, Christian, middle-class voice and its heterosexual bias. (Such programs differed in impulse from bilingual schooling, which coped with the problems of youngsters who spoke no English.) Third World cultures, deemed more humane and natural, would produce a more equitable polity and better people as well. Though these cultures hardly fostered the values of openness and pluralism that multiculturalists prized, suitable rewritings of history, glossy mythologizings of other religions, and occasional plain fabrications met current demands. Sophia would replace Christ (a sop to women), Kwanza would replace Christmas (for blacks), and children would learn about legitimate alternatives to the nuclear family and heterosexuality (*Heather Has Two Mommies).* Languages more in tune with their needs would displace standard English, thus ending the monopoly of white means of communication and legitimizing black, yellow, and red learning styles and grammatical modes. Better yet, writing—patriarchal, phallocentric, bourgeois and elitist—would give way to nonverbal and emotional means of communication.

The multiculturalist assault on the core themes of American edu-

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cation was part of a wider effort to redefine American civilization and genuinely to alter the country's character. Since equality of opportunity resulted in uneven outcomes whereby some gained but many fell behind, a multicultural curriculum with no standards of uniformity would also insure that no one lost. The elimination of grades thus made everyone feel good. All could win. These novel educational experiences would also somehow magically transform students into adults able to confront the complexity of modern life. Equality of results thus remained part of the hidden agenda of the multiculturalists.

But their attempts to reduce learning to a feel-good, everyone-can-be-a-winner charade, took little account of the difficulties modern life presented for its graduates. Nor did it attempt to teach the skills demanded for negotiating such difficulties. By denigrating the very core of traditional American middle-class education, in favor of the mores of the social margins, multiculturalists effectively robbed students of the few tools useful for their future that schools could impart. In fact, all evidence, whether genetic or environmental, demonstrated that the very values multiculturalists held in contempt—embedded in the nuclear or extended family, and in the community—shaped aptitudes and career choices that promised success. Incontestible historical, anthropological, and sociological data revealed indissoluable bonds between calling and culture, reflected in lifestyles, family strength, traditions of mutual aid, and attitude toward the world. The multiculturalists' error lay in regarding those mainstream bonds as necessarily negative restraints on people's capacity to act, when, in fact, they were the mechanisms that empowered individuals to confront life's challenges.

The balkanization impulse that multiculturalism encouraged gained strength from poetic evocations of the imagined golden age of segregation which, by the 1990s, acquired a rosy tinge. As the civil rights struggle lost relevance, and its participants passed from the scene, a new generation cast a skeptical glance at its history. Since the present left so much to be desired, the motives and slogans of earlier battles lost relevance, their outcome thought to be of questionable value. Hence, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a prominent academic whose professional career explicated for white America the double voices of black folk (one for their own, a different one for the enemy) movingly re-created his childhood world in a small southern town that insulated blacks against shocks of racism. There life revolved around family and work, and segregation provided black communities an inner cohesiveness since lost. Gone with that world also was an ethic of mutual responsibility in which the better-off cared for those

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less fortunate with whom they once lived side by side. The hated whites remained distant enough to enable black youngsters to grow up without any sense of inferiority.

The difficulties of integration reinforced the attractiveness of such idyllic portrayals. To protect black culture from obliteration by the larger white society, some chose to "cocoon" voluntarily. By 1994, 25 percent of America's blacks lived in the suburbs, often marked off by racial lines, products less of segregation than of voluntary decisions. Ironically, despite the support forced busing had once received from reformers, black intellectuals by then complained that integration meant "some kind of orchestrated effort to mix people together"—precisely what courts in the 1970s had worked overtime to achieve.

More than two centuries earlier, Rousseau had outlined the concomitants of equality of results—enrichment of the state, impoverishment of the people by removal of surpluses through taxation, and destruction of the arts, science, and civilization, which Rousseau regarded as the cause of inequality. In theory, at least, he considered the price worth paying. Most Americans did not, and amidst all the challenges and assaults, they held stubbornly to the the historic concept of equality of opportunity through free competition, which gave them their liberty. Newcomers to the United States in the 1990s knew from personal experience the fate of societies dedicated to implementing harebrained blueprints hatched in Paris, London, Phnom Penh, or Beijing. When they sent their children to school, they wanted, not multicultural curriculums, but the kind of education that would allow their offspring to forge ahead. They, too, recognized the connection between an open society, great opportunities, and liberty. The architects of the Great Society, who thought they were broadening the contours of that liberty, and indeed succeeded in doing so by implementing the social programs envisioned by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry Truman, could not have foreseen the strange fruits their programs would bear.

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Lines at Sea on Love and Death

SAMUEL HAZO

1

Remembering the perfect rainbow
that bridged the port in Domenica
where a freighter loaded
with bananas bound for Britain
blocked my view of a school bus
crushed beneath a giant oak
toppled by Hurricane David
and left there as a shrine to death
by chance, I think of you,
Judge Jean Follain, preoccupied
and by yourself that evening
on the Place de la Concorde
when the veering taxi charged
like a high, blind wind
with you oblivious and in the way.

2

Watching an inchworm scrunching
and extending, scrunching and extending
on a mango leaf in the garden,
the house girl from Nevis bunches
the sheets from the honeymoon suite
against her bulge so that she looks
twice-pregnant until the sheet-
musk and the peeled banana
left uneaten on the breakfast tray
remind her of the night she scrunched

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beneath him in the laundry room
as he inched deeper on his kneecaps
and repeated she was different, different . . .

3

The ship's wake at midnight
widened white but flattened
back to Caribbean ink
that matched the ace of spades
the blackjack dealer fingered
in the bright casino while half
a mile underneath the keel
the Santa Teresa de Colón
with all hands still aboard
and half a billion in coin
and bullion barreled in her fo'c's'le
shifted deeper on a shelf
of sand that left the barnacled
mermaid mounted on the white
unburied prow still pointing
like a compass straight at Spain.

4

Smelling like the aftersweat of sex,
the leftover swordfish sections
scraped from supper dishes
into garbage drums and mixed
with crimson lettuce leafage
and the grinds of ebony espresso
waited for the galleymen
to wheel the drums astern
and dump the bites and bones
of what began in water
in the first place back to brine

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and all the underwater mouths
that gathered to receive rejections
from the captain's table while the captain
and his special guests sipped
crème de menthe and sucked their cigarettes.

5

After dabbing her armpits dry,
she lay spread-eagled on her towel
smoothly squared across the bed
and memorized her body in the angled
mirror like a country waiting
for discovery while, three decks down,
the purser, knowing that it took
another's body touching his
to make him feel his own,
noticed how a mountain on St. Kitts
recalled the soft slope
of his wife's hip and thigh
when she lay bare beside him
in her sleep and how her skin
became a fresh geography he saw
with either hand whenever
he touched her for the first
and only time, again and again.

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Abroad

MATTHEW STEVENSON

The past is another country: they do things differently there.
—L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*

THREE YEARS AGO AT MIDSUMMER, when shimmering waves of grain in the Swiss countryside give it aspects of Kansas, I moved with my family from a row house in Brooklyn to a farming village outside Geneva. Out the back door, instead of the New York neighbor who paved his yard and then painted it the colors of the Jamaican flag, were fields "buried in wheat and corn," as Willa Cather described those of her prairie childhood. Farther on in the summer haze were vineyards whose wine was selling in nearby cellars and the first ring of the alps that glimmered either with snowcaps or the fireworks of Bastille Day.

Like many moves abroad, this one was unexpected. I left New York for Switzerland on a routine trip, with several suits and a sweater. Six weeks later I called home with the proposition of a move to Europe. We weighed our family and friends in America against the echo of small-arms fire in the Brooklyn night and decided to try what the French call the provincial life.

Geneva is the old world, with a graceful lakefront and a huge small-poodle population, that survives without clusters of motels or car washes on its perimeter. As with any city in the world, it also has its expatriate ghettos: tree-lined suburbs where the language is English, the bridge club meets Thursdays, and cable television makes it possible to shave by the newscasts of Dan Rather. The coffee may be espresso, but the caffeine is all American.

By chance I found a house off the information superhighway. I answered an ad on a bulletin board and, one Saturday morning, I biked seven miles west of the city. Once clear of the congestion, I rode through springtime fields, feeling like a character in *Escape from*

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New York who crosses the 59th Street Bridge and ends up in *Heidi.*

Struck by the view and the landlord's eloquence on village life, I rented the house without counting the bedrooms or investigating the bus schedule. We spent the summer unpacking boxes, looking for French classes, and adjusting to the incomprehension that goes with foreign life. The first night, when I arrived home from work, my wife reported a strange chirping sound that we later discovered was the telephone.

In the three years since moving to the village, we have tried our best to mix locally. Our two daughters attend the local schools. We go to all the village *fêtes*—holidays celebrated with town suppers—and we buy bread each morning in the small *boulangerie.*

In turn, the village has been gracious in accepting us, even if our American taste for gadgets marks us as distinctly non-Swiss. When our son was born, the postlady, whom we know only at the mailbox, knitted him a sweater. Others in town invited us to their mountain chalet, and we have danced at a local wedding reception. In Spain or Greece, all this would happen before the moving van pulled away from the driveway. But in Switzerland, we could live in the village for three generations, take up farming, drive a small four-cylinder Renault, and still we would be known as the newcomers, or perhaps *Les Americains.*

As much as we want to assimilate locally, our neighbors are correct in always thinking of us as Americans. We buy all of our clothes from the Land's End catalogue and live on a steady diet of strange food. Whenever guests come from the United States, they are instructed to bring Cheerios, chocolate chips, peanut butter, and maple syrup. We decorate the house on Halloween and, on the fourth Thursday in November, we perplex the local butcher with an order for a fresh turkey.

We also spend a lot of time struggling with French. My wife and I both studied it in school and thus arrived knowing that verb conjugations were in our future. We acquired dictionaries and enrolled in classes. I speak some French at the bank where I work and thus know the language of bankruptcy and goodwill. My wife spends most of her time chatting with small children, so she knows the words for *sandbox, wading pool,* and "be nice to your brother." We speak French with the neighbors, but usually the subjects are lost dogs and the weather.

Not to have fluency and slang in a language is to inhabit one of those cloistered worlds so often described by Charlotte Brontë. Although after three years we can now have dinners in French and speak on the telephone, most of the time we still feel like Lucy Snowe, the heroine of *Villette,* whom Brontë dispatches to a life of

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homesickness in Belgium: "I had no flow," she confesses of learning French, "only a hesitating trickle of language."

My father describes teaching his father to drive in the 1930s and says of my grandfather that he would never shift out of first gear, finding it sufficient for his purposes. I feel the same way about my French and steer most sentences away from the subjunctive, as though it were a New York City pothole.

My wife is prone to Franglais—the insertion of English words when the needed French is missing. Often the French word is similar to the English, but sometimes the connection is less apparent. At one dinner, she launched into an account of a trip we made to Prague and from that started describing the wonders of Czech beer. No, she explained to those at the dinner, it didn't have all the chemicals Americans inject into their Budweis. The guests didn't follow, so she switched to Franglais, and announced that Czech beer was "*sans* preservatives," which unfortunately in French means: "without condoms."

No matter how long I live abroad, one of my internal clocks will always be set on American time. On holidays, family birthdays, and distant family gatherings, I think of myself as stranded in the Emerald City and want nothing more than to petition the great Oz for a trip home.

Come Sunday afternoons in the autumn, I long for professional football in a way that suggests it is a chemical dependence. And like James Joyce in Trieste, tracing the steps of his imagination around Dublin, I find that a lot of my daydreaming is spent on walks along Flatbush Avenue or on Mulberry Street heading from Little Italy to Greenwich Village.

We worry that the kids are missing an American childhood, that one day we'll wake up to discover three Swiss in their bunks. They spend summers in America, visiting relatives, but speak French at school and know little about Niagara Falls or the Statue of Liberty. One of our daughters announced one evening that she had learned a new letter at school and then pronounced something that sounded like "airrrrr," a perfectly rolled French *r*.

Most people think young children can learn a foreign language in the amount of time advertised for taped lessons. But our oldest daughter spent a miserable year in kindergarten, sucking her thumb, and understanding little. We fretted, in parent fashion, until one afternoon, about a year after we arrived, she started speaking the most perfect French—the same kind that is so difficult for us to understand.

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Having children fluent in the local language makes us feel all the more like immigrant parents, speaking in thick accents and being something of an oddity to their friends. On the bus to work in the morning, I feel very much like a Russian emigrant on the F train in Brooklyn. I'm wearing a foreign-cut suit with foreign shoes and reading a foreign newspaper.

Another Brooklyn subway rider, Willy Loman, reflected: "I still feel—kind of temporary about myself." That also describes the uncertainty of much life abroad. Many expatriates do not know if they're going to finish their days in Flanders fields or be called home at the end of June.

We came for two years, like most Americans we know—even those now applying for permanent residence. Some days we imagine our children here in high school; at other times, when the weather is grim and friends seem faraway, we look aloft at the jets banking west above the Jura Mountains on a course for America, and there isn't one we don't wish we were on.

The pleasure of Switzerland is that it rarely lives up to its reputation for stale predictability. In three years of work in a bank, I have never seen a suitcase of cash. A few shops by the railroad station sell noisy clocks, but most of the production run is hustled off to Japan. And I suspect more chocolate is consumed in an American mall than anywhere in Switzerland.

Most surprising is the country's devotion to Athenian democracy. Important decisions are made in town and village elections, as was true in America when Tocqueville wrote that "the township was organized before the county, the county before the state, the state before the union." A stock journalistic story about Switzerland involves a chance meeting of two men at a cocktail party. After considerable conversation, one discovers that the other is president of the country. The cantons—equivalent to American counties—decide school hours, tax rates, budget items, and unemployment compensation. To become a naturalized Swiss citizen, you need a character reference from your town and its agreement to support you in your old age.

At a time when the rest of Europe is moving toward political union, and even Russia is weighing membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Switzerland is retreating into its historic neutrality and isolation. Led by the German-speaking cantons, the country voted against a first step toward European confederation. And the same voting bloc is opposing more truck routes through the alps, deciding instead that the containers can piggyback on trains.

Income from banking, tourism, and watchmaking allows the Swiss

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to subsidize the dairy farmers whose cows are so splendidly belled. The same is true of the *viticulteurs* in our village whose wine is protected from the flood of French imports. European union would end these subsidies, and without them the small farms and vineyards would wither, and the fields around every village would be sold to sub-developers.

Nor are the Swiss relaxing their defenses, even though most invaders these days carry ice cream cones or strap skis to their cars. The Genevois fought their last war in 1602, when Savoyards, from neighboring French Savoie, attacked Geneva on a cold December night. An old woman walking the city ramparts spotted the French placing ladders against the city walls and, after sounding the alarm, doused the invaders with boiling soup—presumably a defensive capability then allowed under Geneva convention.

No one knows if the Savoyards would have made it if threatened only with raclette or fondue, but since then the Swiss have preferred to prepare for wars rather than actually fight them. All Swiss men serve in the army until age forty, and most spend a month of each year playing soldier. They shoot mortars in the wilderness, fly F-18s through alpine crevices, inspect the defenses near Zermatt, and enjoy time off from work at nearly full salary. It all seems like national summer camp, until you consider that Adolph Hitler bypassed Switzerland, having decided the cost of an alpine invasion too high.

Whether Hitler needed Switzerland to launder stolen gold or purchase ball bearings is one of those historical questions that still arouse passion on both sides. But a military friend told us that the German invasion plans called for eighteen divisions and that there were great fears that they would bog down in the mountains. During the war, the Swiss army went on alert several times, expecting an attack, and mobilized its army to patrol the borders, including the one with France that we see from our backyard.

We often try to imagine the frontier during the war. Vichy France, in particular the jurisdiction of those such as Klaus Barbie, was less than a mile from our house. In the little towns that we can see while we sip coffee or enjoy a barbeque, Jews were rounded up for final destinations. But the war never touched our village or its inhabitants.

Civil defense is understandably a passion of the Swiss, and nearly all underground garages and tunnels double as bomb shelters. Similarly, new houses must be built with a shelter, although John McPhee, in his book about the Swiss army, noted that they tend to fill up with ski boots and wine. Our shelter has mothballed long-playing records to get us through the nuclear winter. Nevertheless, how many houses in Bosnia have bomb shelters, or how many Bosnians wish they did?

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The durability of Switzerland was an early lesson. In the summer of 1991, the confederation celebrated its seven hundredth anniversary. In America such an occasion would merit William Tell impersonators and fireworks like those over Dresden. But although Geneva and Zurich each lit up the night sky, the main celebration took place in towns and villages.

On August 1, the date of the original cantonal pact, our village and a neighboring one erected a white tent and served a dinner of soup, sausage, cheese, bread, and wine. The local parliamentarian made a speech, only parts of which we understood. But we did get his allusions to Yugoslavia and the message of Switzerland's stability amidst the turmoil of Europe. A few couples danced to accordion music, and when the sun set, a bonfire was lit on a nearby field. Across the valley between the alps and the Jura, and then north along Lake Geneva, similar bonfires connected one village to another, as if part of a tribal ritual. After the glow faded, everyone walked home, with the children carrying small paper lanterns, which bobbed along the vineyard paths like spirits from an ancient world.

One consequence of our move to Switzerland was that we gave up television. American sets do not work in Europe, and a decent television in Geneva can cost more than a thousand dollars, before all the cable charges that bring Australian Rules Football into your life. But we balked at more than the price. Our daughters, then four and almost two, were reaching the age when we would have had to offer rudimentary explanations about the war in the Balkans or the reason for so many rub outs in prime time.

We decided to follow the advice of the Oompa-Loompas, Roald Dahl's creations, who told Charlie and Mr. Willy Wonka:

> The most important thing we've learned,
> As far as children are concerned,
> Is never, never, NEVER let
> Them near your television set . . .
>
> It rots the senses in the head!
> It kills imagination dead!
> It clogs and clutters up the mind!
> It makes a child so dull and blind
> He can no longer understand
> A fantasy or fairyland!

The children have filled the void with books on tape and a host of imaginary friends, some of whom seem indistinquishable from the stars of daytime televsion. We don't miss the French talk shows, which feature men in striped shirts, smoking cigarettes and chatting to

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women wearing scarves. Nor is it a hardship to pass up dubbed American programs such as *Hawaii, police d'Etat.* But it is a dislocation not to see the news clippings of the presidential election or the effects of the Los Angeles earthquake.

Aside from phone calls, letters and travelers' tales, our connection to the dark continent is with the *International Herald Tribune*, which washes ashore every day as if a series of notes in a bottle. I look forward to it all day and read it only in the evenings, turning first to the sports pages and afterward to the scandal updates from Washington and the train wrecks in India. The essence of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, and once the voice of Americans in Paris, it is dutiful in recording wars and deficits. The progress of the New York Yankees can be tracked like that of IBM. But as a letter from home, it is as disappointing as finding an envelope from a friend that contains one of those computer-printed Christmas letters that tells about Uncle Karl's colostomy.

Seeing America through the prism of the *Herald Tribune* is like watching a silent movie. I know that President Clinton likes jogging, the occasional hamburger, and night riding with state troopers, but the sound of his voice or his instincts for war and peace are as hard to fathom as the images in the cabinets of Dr. Caligari.

Nor does the *Herald Tribune* choose columnists who can provide the sound track. Most could write about my own children, and I don't think I would be interested. The political commentators speak the Esperanto of Washington, for which local television is the only dictionary. Only in the humor columns and the comics—Doonesbury, Calvin and Hobbes, Art Buchwald, and Russell Baker—do I hear voices of the friends we miss in Brooklyn.

As best as we can, we try to stay current with American writing. We subscribe to *The New Yorker*, but, as with so many other magazines, we get the feeling that we have come late to a cocktail party where everybody knows everybody and no one knows us. On my trips to the States, I try to fill a bag with new books. Occasionally in the carpetbag we discover a new writer—at least to us—such as Barbara Kingsolver, but mostly it is easier to replay the classics, especially those that describe Americans abroad.

In the past year I have read all the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald as if they were a box of old letters. Stories of undergraduate pretensions or first jobs in New York free memories that a life abroad can often store away with the luggage. Waking up every morning to the Swiss countryside, I need to be reminded of Nassau Street in Princeton or the way that the late-afternoon sun dapples the waters of Long Island Sound on whose shores I grew up.

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Fitzgerald is also the columnist that I long to find in the *Herald Tribune.* When I read that "Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island sprang from his Platonic conception of himself," I think of Ronald Reagan or Bill Clinton and their invented lives. What better describes America's dependency on celebrity than his observation, in *The Beautiful and Damned,* that "there was nothing, it seemed, that grew stale so soon as pleasure."

Without the interruption of television, we assumed that we would spend our evenings improving our French or perhaps developing a stamp collection. In fact, after children are corralled, branded with toothpaste, and lassoed to bed, there is neither the time nor the inclination to read Balzac with a dictionary or study postmarks from the Solomon Islands.

We fill the evenings reading newspapers or chatting at the dining-room table, flipping through L.L. Bean or Ikea catalogues as though they were family albums, or reading out loud passages from Dave Barry. But many nights, when otherwise we would be watching *Hawaii, police d'Etat,* we retreat into familiar passages, much the way frontier families huddled with the Bible.

My wife prefers the proverbs of Peter Mayle, whose provincial life is not unlike our own, except that he has better access to truffles. My texts are a series of bicycling histories by Samuel Abt, a talented writer whose day job is editing the *Herald Tribune,* which—to be fair—is superb in its coverage of Paris-Roubaix or the Giro d'Italia. Without access to baseball, football, and ice hockey, which I get only as box scores, I have filled the sports fix with cycling, and Abt is the Marlow of professional racing, as well as the hagiographer of Greg LeMond, the American who is the three-time winner of the Tour de France.

I have admiration for LeMond, not just for his accomplishments, but because he is an American—with three children, no less, and undoubtedly relatives who wonder what's he up to in Europe—who has triumphed in a foreign culture. He races with a French team, speaks what sounds to me like good French (I borrow a television for the Tour), and has succeeded not just in sport but in overcoming the attitude that Americans abroad are *domestiques* not *patrons.*

Among the many pleasures of biking is that it comes with a rich vocabulary, well recorded by Abt, that can be dragged into conversations that require a sports analogy. Riders never tire in the mountains—they "blow up in the hills"; nor are they left behind—they're "dropped." Football and baseball analogies find an audience with some Americans, but no one ends a meeting in Europe saying, "I think we oughta punt." At least with the language of cycling, I have small talk for taxis and trains. The other sports, such as European

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soccer, I will never understand, especially the impulse of British fans to treat every match as if it were a prison riot.

Not only do I read about cycling to take the chill off a long day, but on evenings and weekends, in true Walter Mitty fashion, I pull on a Brooklyn jersey and Italian racing shoes and head for the hills. Although I sometimes ride with a local *vélo* club or friends at exhausting speeds, the rides more suited to my age and temperament are long loops through the ancient French towns that hug the hillsides of the Jura or the slopes that lead to the alps.

What is unexpected on these tours is the forlorness of French villages, even on Saturdays. Lace curtains with pastoral designs cover the windows of houses on narrow, worn streets; and barns, with their rusting equipment and crumbling, weathered cement, suggest paintings by Edward Hopper rather than Claude Monet.

These rides evoke not just the timeless insularity of rural French life, but also the only novel of Alain-Fournier, a writer killed in the First World War, titled *Le Grand Meaulnes*, which was published in English as *The Wanderer*. As with many of my rides, especially in spring when the roads are a mixed metaphor of flowering fruit trees and snow-covered alps, the book is a flight of fantasy through the French landscape that ends with the discovery of a mystical chateau, not unlike the manor houses that surround Geneva.

What I appreciate about *Le Grand Meaulnes*, especially when living in Europe and far from New York, is that it is also an account of the difficult journey that we all make away from home. Not unlike Dorothy in Oz, Meaulnes discovers an enchanted world that is at once terrifying because it is unfamiliar and exotic because of its romance. The novel ends with Meaulnes on his bicycle:

> As he rode away from the town, charming farmhouses appeared here and there on either side of the valley near the banks of the river, their pointed gables covered with green trellises showing through the trees. On their lawns no doubt girls were gravely exchanging love secrets. It was a setting for people with hearts and souls—innocent souls . . .

Often I end my rides in Présilly, a French village high enough in the hills that the churchyard commands a sweeping view of Geneva, the lake, and the surrounding mountains. On this square the town erected a monument to its own adolescents who never made the journey home from the wars. The simple obelisk reads:

Alsace Verdun Marne
Présilly
A ses enfants
Morts pour la Patrie

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The names of the children engraved in stone, such as Fontaine, Megevand, and Naville, are also the names of classmates in our daughters' school.

The idea in Europe that war lurks around the corner from peace is most clearly felt in the similarities between Switzerland and the old Yugoslavia. Both have a mix of religions and cultures. Each has citizens that do not speak the same language. And each evolved from a defensive pact of rural cantons to thwart neighboring imperial designs.

On my rides around Geneva, I am reminded constantly of Balkan villages and especially of a lazy summer spent in Yugoslavia. During my senior year in college I studied Serbo-Croatian, read the Bosnian novels of Ivo Andrić and, after graduation, spent several weeks swimming in mountain streams and exploring the villages and towns of Old Serbia, which like those in Switzerland are a mixture of wheat, orchards, dairy barns, and softness in the late-afternoon sunlight. I had been accepted at graduate school in the fall, and this was the summer of my Grand Tour, although instead of Paris and St. Tropez, I was footloose in Sofia and Sarajevo.

The journey had elements of danger and burlesque, hallmarks of any trip behind the Iron Curtain. On the train to Nish from Bulgaria, I shared a compartment with four Turkish students, who hated everything American and, at that particular moment, America's only representative on the train. In Nish, it was impossible for me ever to be alone. On those quiet evenings when it appeared I might retire early with a book, my host would show up to serenade me with his accordion.

After several weeks, and not a few evenings with the accordion, I decided to travel to Sarajevo and southwest to the coast. In particular, I wanted to see the bridge on the Drina, which is also the title of the Andrić novel that recounts the history of a Bosnian town, Višegrad, during successive periods of Turkish occupation.

To get to Višegrad and Sarajevo, I had to take a narrow-gauge train across eastern Bosnia, through towns that now have been ethnically cleansed. Andrić opens his novel by writing "The river Drina flows through narrow gorges between steep mountains or through deep ravines with precipitous banks," and the same was true of the miniature train that took all day to reach the minarets of Sarajevo.

The novel ends at the start of the First World War with the bridge's destruction—"This terrible blow which seemed to destroy, break up and suffocate everything down to man's very thought"—and so too the destruction of the balance in Bosnia between Serbs, Moslems, gypsies, Austrians, and Jews that the bridge had come to symbolize. The book was written in 1959, but the story continues.

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With Andrić as a guide, it was easy to see Bosnia as Daniel Boone saw Kentucky, "a dark and bloody land." But, as the Swiss well understand, Europe is many bridges across many Drinas, and as I ride on my bicycle around Geneva or take trains across the Continent, I wonder which idyllic towns in twenty years may become the wraiths of Gorazde or Mostar.

When you live abroad, the days that are hardest are the American holidays. To be sure, Christmas, Easter, and New Year's Day are celebrated as in the United States, but Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day are just routine days at the office. And Swiss holidays, some of which are a delight because of their elegant simplicity, do not evoke the childhood reminiscences that are the pleasures of such days off.

Nevertheless, a year ago, I found myself flying to Washington, D.C., on the Fourth of July. It was a business trip, and I was arriving on a late flight from Amsterdam. But I had decided to go immediately in a rented car to the Mall to watch whatever fireworks or spectacle would be in progress.

Any trip to America raises my spirits. I see family and friends, browse in bookstores, eat familiar foods, and slip into old habits, such as reading the *New York Times*, as if they were slippers I'd left at the outbound airport.

But trips to the States also emphasize how difficult it is to go home again. The worst is the sense of not quite belonging. My home is now Switzerland, not Midwood Street in Brooklyn. It depresses me to stay in hotels or to feel like a tourist in New York, the city where I was born. And sometimes it is hard even with old friends to pick up where we left off.

Nor do I always recognize the United States, especially on a short trip. I am not current with the latest political strategy or movies making a run in the theaters. New Yorkers seem indifferent to the guns on their streets, and the importance of Tonya Harding is lost in translation.

On this particular evening in Washington, however, I had none of these mixed emotions. I collected my bag and, in that trance of the long-haul traveler, presented my passport at customs. Like everyone else, I usually get a question or two, or sometimes a ball score or a "Welcome home." But in this instance I was taken to a corner of the arrival hall and surrounded by several agents. They searched my suitcase and then my briefcase and wallet, item by item.

All I had to declare were Swiss chocolates and a model KLM airplane for my son—hardly the stuff of big-time smuggling. But I resented it when the agents opened my passport and started asking

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sarcastic questions. Was I still in contact with anyone in Argentina? Why had I been to Thailand? Was this stamp not Russian?

What stung the most were the questions about the Solomon Islands. I had visited the battlefields on Guadalcanal where my father and many others like him had fought so that we could have more Fourths of July. But it all seemed un-American, as did having curiosity about the world.

Mercifully, the inquisition was short-lived. I supplied my social security number, which was inserted into the computer, at which point the agents apologized for their suspicions. I passed into the humid Washington night and drove to the Mall.

The fireworks were over, and all that I saw of Washington, besides a silhouette of the Lincoln Memorial, was a traffic jam seemingly the size of Switzerland. I had wanted to find the capital and the Fourth of July as magical as they were in the sixth grade. Instead, shaken by the rude arrival and distracted with jet lag, I wandered through some grim slums, yet another European lost in a rented car. When I finally got to my hotel room—with its molded plastic and central air conditioning instead of the screened windows and crickets of my childhood summers—it was easy to recall the way *The Great Gatsby* ends: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

For me nothing better expresses the mixed emotions of an expatriate—the longings of homesickness and adventure—than Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, which starts in a villa in the Sabine hills, overlooking Rome, and ends with the bells tolling in Santa Fe. It is the story of French missionaries sent to New Mexico in the late nineteenth century, although it could easily describe anyone dispatched abroad for business or a cause.

"That parting was not a parting," Willa Cather writes of those who left their small French towns for the American Southwest, "but an escape—a running away, a betrayal of family trust for the sake of a higher trust." Father Latour, the archbishop, carves his diocese from the red, parched landscape around Albuquerque, even though he longs for his native Auvergne in France, "the comeliness of the villages, the cleanness of the country-side, the beautiful lines and cloisters of his own college." Nevertheless, as Willa Cather notes, "in the Old World he found himself homesick for the New." For me these emotions are strongest whenever family, especially my parents, come for a visit. Saying good-bye at the Geneva airport, I know well the feelings of the young vicar, "torn in two before his eyes by the desire to go and the necessity to stay."

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The Jewish Gangster

A Conversation Across Generations

JOE KRAUS

SOMETIME IN THE EARLY 1980s my mother came to me with a question. She showed me a dog-eared copy of *The Joker Is Wild*, Art Cohn's biography of the comedian Joe E. Lewis, and asked me if I would dig up what I could about a particular passage in it. In order to give a sense of how violent the time of Lewis's early career was, Cohn describes a scene in which Dion O'Bannion, arch-rival of Al Capone and boss of the gang that would eventually be massacred in the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, walked up to two Jewish gangsters, Davey and Maxie Miller, as they were leaving a crowded theater, put a gun in the stomach of each, and pulled the trigger. According to Cohn, Maxie fell dead instantly but Davey, because he wore his belt high, had the bullet rebound off his buckle and leave him unhurt. According to my mother, Davey was an uncle she had known throughout childhood, and Maxie was her father, the man who had died before she was three years old, a man she had never really known. My mother's question, of course, was whether this was in fact how her father had died.

All of this was stunningly, devastatingly, new to me. All grandparents, to my mind, were like the only one I had known. My father's mother with her white hair, periodic wisecracks, and life of emigration, hard work in the restaurant business, and circle of old lady friends seemed to represent a whole generation. The idea that a Jewish grandparent, and especially my Jewish grandparent, could have been part of a world with guns, gangs, and Al Capone was nothing short of fantastic. Nothing in all the family history I had undertaken had ever suggested such a marvelous mystery. Like most people born after World War II, I had only the vaguest idea that there had ever been anything like Jewish gangsters. Jews weren't tough; we were cerebral. We didn't own guns; we lobbied our congressmen for gun control.

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It wasn't terribly difficult to answer my mother's question. Two or three major books on Capone and the bootleggers gave me dates that I cross-referenced with microfilmed newspapers. No, my grandfather had not been gunned down in the streets of Chicago. But Cohn had not invented the incident; he had simply gotten it backwards. The Miller Brothers, my grandfather and great-uncle, were shot by O'Bannion as they walked out of a show at the LaSalle Theater, but it was Maxie whose belt buckle had protected him. Davey was the one shot and virtually given up for dead as a casualty in the Prohibition wars. A remarkable banner headline on January 21, 1924, in the old Chicago *Herald-Examiner* proclaims, "Gang War Over Miller Feared"; underneath that is a separate, lower banner headline announcing the scandal that we know today as Teapot Dome. Davey recovered and went on to a colorful career as one of Chicago's best-known boxing referees. Maxie lived another two or three years before dying, as my mother had been told, of lung disease.

Cohn's mistake is obviously a serious one. Best-selling biographies that wind up being made into major motion pictures (this one starred Frank Sinatra) ought to be responsible enough to report who actually died and who did not. But it's an understandable mistake as well. Cohn's research consisted largely of spending as much time as he could with Joe E. Lewis over a period of several months in the early 1950s and immersing himself in Lewis's reminiscences. As fallback, he knew that he could interview promoters, agents, and other performers, that he could review show-business publications and old ads, and that he could turn to what was left of Lewis's friends and colleagues to document and confirm the history he was writing. When Cohn cited his story out of Chicago's Jewish gangster history, there weren't many places he could turn for official documentation. True, the earliest biographies of Capone had already been published and the original newspaper accounts remained. As I imagine it, Cohn overlooked those sources because the real record of gangster history seemed to be the stories and folklore he heard Lewis and his cronies exchanging. Since most of his sources remembered that the Miller Brothers were shot, and most knew Davey was still alive, he imagined a story and a history that conformed to communal memory.

In one respect, then, Cohn made no mistake at all. For most of the last seventy years, the official history of the Jewish gangster has been a folklore history. Actual facts and dates have mattered less than legends and reputations. In the case of another instance involving my mother's family, I had an ongoing argument with a friend of mine, now deceased, who was a boy during Prohibition.

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Someone pulled a trigger and killed two on-the-take off-duty policemen in a Prohibition speakeasy. I have half a dozen newspaper accounts that say it was Hirschie Miller, another of the Miller Brothers, who did the shooting and who was eventually acquitted on the strength of a self-defense plea. My friend insists otherwise, claiming instead that Hirschie's companion, Samuel "Nails" Morton, the most prominent of Chicago's early Jewish gangsters and the model for Nails Nathan in the classic film *Public Enemy*, was the triggerman. "Hirschie was soft," my friend explained. "Nails did the shooting, and they let Hirschie take the rap because they knew he'd have an easier time beating it." I had the documents on my side; he had the weight of folklore and legend on his.

The tension in gangster history between documentation and folklore makes itself evident in the way a grandparent who knew Prohibition at firsthand tells a story and the way a grandchild born some time after World War II tells it. More significantly, it reflects the different experiences of different generations. My generation's relationship to the Jewish community has largely taken place through institutions our parents or we ourselves have sought out: synagogues, Sunday Schools, Jewish camps, and Hillels. My grandparents' generation was the Jewish community, one that started at their doorstep and stretched some definite number of blocks in every direction. Whether they lived on Chicago's West Side, New York's Lower East Side, Detroit's Hastings Street area, or in an analogous neighborhood in some other city, the people of that generation found themselves in tight communities where their addresses announced their identity and where the way non-Jews viewed them was colored by the reputation of the entire community.

As a result, members of my grandparents' generation had a very different relationship to their Jewish criminals than my generation has to the criminals of ours. Ivan Boesky and Heidi Fleiss are criminals who happen to be Jews. "Nails" Morton, Jake Guzik, Dutch Schultz, and Meyer Lansky were Jews who happened to be criminals. Members of my generation run the risk of opening old wounds when we ask questions or speculate about old Prohibition-era gangsters. One of my cousins can talk in detail of the things she remembers from the era, but the only things she remembers are positive. An uncle has quietly discouraged my research for years, fearful that I would be upset at some of the things I might learn about my family. One man called me "worse than an anti-Semite" for an article I had written in which I discussed the underworld connections of one of his relatives; he claimed that I posed as a Jew and a friend but actually gave ammunition to contemporary skinheads, Nazis, and

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other Jew-haters. Research that to me began as personal and historical was to him unquestionably communal.

II

From the distance of a sociologist's perspective, most Prohibition-era Jewish gangsters followed a general pattern. They started out as neighborhood kids clearly going bad, getting into fights with older boys, and then getting into fights with boys from close-by ethnic neighborhoods. When they'd won enough fights, they "ran" the neighborhood, and such businesses as the numbers games, election slugging, and small protection rackets fell into their laps. Having grown up in tight Jewish communities and having taken their profits from their ability to organize within the Jewish community, they were unmistakably Jews. Neighbors, old classmates, awed business owners, and, above all, impressionable children knew them first-hand and spun ever-grander stories about them from the few facts they could learn. Jewish gangsters stole, hurt, and killed certainly, but they were *our* thieves and killers, and as such they were accorded a place in community folklore.

Two of the richest document resources for considering the history of the Jewish gangster make apparent the inherent tension between looking at that history as story and looking at it as sociology. Jenna Weisman Joselit's *Our Gang* is probably the best book anyone has written on the subject of Jewish gangsters. Rather than attempting to chronicle who these Jewish gangsters were or what they did, she retraces the way the Jewish community responded to them. By concentrating on the New York area and selecting just a handful of incidents and characters for scrutiny, she demonstrates that from the turn of the century through the Prohibition era Jewish leaders recognized it as their community responsibility to try to reform Jewish criminals. Ever fearful that the stigma of Jewish criminality might affect national immigration policies, religious and social leaders funded settlement houses, established outreach programs for incarcerated Jews, built an all-Jewish reform school, and challenged damning statistics on Jewish crime with statistics of their own.

As Joselit sees it, second-generation Jews had a different attitude toward their criminals. As more and more of them left the Jewish neighborhood for opportunities that struck them as more generally American than the ones they had known, the simple fact that there had been Jewish criminals became less significant. Citing an article published in 1923 that asked former residents of the Lower East Side to discuss their memories of the place, Joselit points out how

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surprising it ought to be that none of them mentioned crime at all. She concludes:

> The absence of even a sentence on the Lower East Side and crime suggests that as early as the 1920s, second-generation Jews had begun, perhaps consciously, perhaps not, to "draw anew" not only the geography of New York Jewish life but its history as well. They had relegated the criminal experience to the shadows of American Jewish life.

In other words, at the moment when a history of the Jewish gangster might most completely have been written, the moment when the sons and daughters of the racketeers and the bootleggers stood most squarely with one foot in the old neighborhood and one in the new, the people who might have recorded their experiences with Jewish crime were busy forgetting. The old neighborhood became a source of sentimentality for the second-generation Jew, and so the history of the gangster ceased to be a real history at all.

Frederic Thrasher, in his classic 1927 study *The Gang*, proposed the theory that criminal gangs develop in general out of the play groups that form in neighborhoods where large populations of uprooted people—immigrants to the country, the city, or even just the neighborhood—are concentrated. A sociologist from the University of Chicago, Thrasher set out to write a dispassionate account of a phenomenon generally overlooked in newspaper and instant history accounts of gangster wars. To avoid the lurid and to direct attention instead on the sociological machinery creating the flood of gang members that Jews, Italians, and other communities saw before and during Prohibition, Thrasher obscures the actual characters and conflicts he considers. He gives many of the gangs in his study three-letter code names such as the AAAs or the DDDs, and when he considers individuals as prominent as the non-Jewish Terry Druggan and Frankie Lake, virtual household names at the time, he avoids naming them by referring to them as " . . . [one gang's] present leaders, whose names have frequently adorned the front pages of Chicago's newspapers."

If Joselit's second-generation Jews, on leaving the neighborhood, begin to lose the history of Jewish criminality, then Thrasher, an outsider to the neighborhoods he examines, intentionally avoids considering that history. His work is fascinating and generally empathetic; he recognizes the particular pressures the criminals of his study face, and so he considers them boys who have been mistreated rather than fiends. But Thrasher is almost maddening because of the way he describes what actually happened during the Prohibition wars. He writes as if he were intimate with the otherwise

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largely vanished history of which gangsters were allied with one another and which crimes redrew the territorial jurisdictions of the underworld but, for professional reasons, refuses to reveal it. In Thrasher's consideration of Jewish gangs in particular, he concludes that they tend toward a "general backwardness in physical combat" and are "predatory rather than combative." It would be fascinating to recover the incidents and anecdotes that brought him to such a conclusion. The notion of Jews possessing cunning represents a stereotype that Jews labor under even today, but here it is issued by a scholar who seems generally successful at leaving prejudice out of his work.

But Thrasher does allow some glimmers of Jewish gangster history to slip into his study. He acknowledges that a few of the Chicago Jewish gangs were supposed to be as tough as any Irish, Italian, Polish, or other ethnic group's gang. What's more, he claims those tougher gangs felt some kind of responsibility for looking after Jews threatened by street violence. Citing a few occasions on which West Side Jewish gangs organized to fight against Polish gangs threatening to carry out pogroms in the neighborhood, he includes a description of one such encounter, written by a resident of the area some years later.

> In the summer of 1921 it was rumored that a few Jewish boys had been assaulted when passing through the Polish community to the southeast. Thereupon a gang of young Jews (considered "sluggers" in the neighborhood) assembled and, led by "Nails" _____, made for the Polish district to seek apologies. They went to the street corners indicated by the boys who had been attacked and started a free-for-all fight. After a sufficient amount of physical punishment had been administered, they withdrew.

The name "'Nails' _____" jumps out, of course. It fits the time, neighborhood, and magnitude of influence of "Nails" Morton, friend and gang associate of the Miller Brothers.

From talking with some of the people who grew up in the old West Side neighborhood, I've heard other accounts of what came to be known as the Battle of Douglas Park. Everyone tells it differently. The leader is sometimes Morton, sometimes Davey Miller, and sometimes the gambling king, Julius "Lovin' Putty" Anixter. The exact year varies, as does the range of the neighborhood made safe as a consequence of the Jewish victory. So far as I know, Thrasher is the only one to have written about the event, and even he relies on an anecdotal account written several years later. The incident (or series of incidents) seems clearly to have marked a turning point in the way Chicago's different ethnic communities got along, and it

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may well have had implications for criminal enterprises as well. With the advent of Prohibition, control of streets and neighborhoods meant control of liquor distribution and enormous profits. Morton, in league eventually with Dion O'Bannion, became within a short time an astonishingly wealthy man.

III

Still another site for the tension between folklore and history is the sudden wave of Hollywood movies dealing with Jewish gangsters. Traditional gangster movies played down ethnicity; Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, and George Raft played characters who were not identifiable as Italians, Irish, or Jews beyond, perhaps, their surnames. But Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* changed the way in which Hollywood understood ethnicity and criminality, and ever since there have been increasingly frequent attempts to make a film creating a comparable lyrical connection between Jews and their gangsters.

A number of recent films have featured Jewish gangsters as characters and have tapped into some of the more enduring myths. *The Godfather, Part II* (1974) presented Lee Strasberg as the mild-seeming Hyman Roth, who drew his criminal power from an uncanny criminal intelligence and whose menace was the product of his very incongruity as a criminal mastermind. *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), directed by Sergio Leone, chronicles the rise and fall of a Prohibition gang and draws heavily on the way in which the gang goes from a neighborhood power to a hazy memory within three decades. *Cohen and Tate* (1989) features Roy Scheider as Mr. Cohen, a dispassionate and efficient mob hit man in the *Murder, Inc.*, tradition. *Miller's Crossing* (1990) by the Coen brothers shows John Turturro playing an amoral Jewish gambler-gunman caught in an underworld squeeze.

In a step that moves a little closer to history and a little further from folklore, the last two or three years have seen in the movies an unprecedented treatment of historic Jewish gangsters. *Billy Bathgate*, from the book by E. L. Doctorow and starring Dustin Hoffman, sets out to mythologize Dutch Schultz by showing his career from the perspective of a teenage boy. *Mobsters* stars Patrick Dempsey and Richard Grieco as the young Meyer Lansky and Bugsy Siegel as they form their alliance with the Italian gangsters Lucky Luciano and Frank Costello. And, most notably, there have been the Bugsy Siegel movies, *The Marrying Man* and *Bugsy*.

It is in those last two, competing characterizations of Siegel that

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the difference in method becomes sharpest. *The Marrying Man* comes from a script by Neil Simon, someone of my parents' generation who has been both inside and outside the tight Jewish neighborhoods that spawned the Jewish gangsters. The movie is about a wealthy playboy who makes the mistake of falling in love with Bugsy Siegel's mistress. When Siegel discovers the affair, he takes his revenge by forcing the two to get married and so sets in motion the rest of the plot. The incident itself never took place. Instead, Simon conjures up Siegel because he remains a folkloric presence. In *Some Like it Hot,* Billy Wilder could have his hapless musician-heroes witness Al Capone at the scene of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre for the same reason; the historical figure existed more in legend than in actual history.

Warren Beatty's Siegel in *Bugsy* is very different. For all of his capacity for violence, he still reaches out to others as a human being. Beatty's Bugsy is driven to find people he can confide in. He sees something of himself in Annette Bening's Virginia Hill and Harvey Keitel's Mickey Cohen, and so he takes both in as partners of one kind or another. The inspiration behind his dream of Las Vegas may come from some inscrutable source, but the dream itself is one that he expects others to recognize. Inasmuch as *Bugsy* is a tragedy, it is so as the story of a larger-than-life figure who cannot make others understand his dreams and so pays for them with his life. Where in other portrayals of Siegel in the movies he appears as a figure of menace pure and simple, Beatty's character appears as a man caught up in forces that finally master him.

While Beatty received most of the credit for the film, it was in fact co-produced and directed by Barry Levinson, who has celebrated the Jewish community in his earlier films, *Diner* and *Avalon.* In contrast to Neil Simon, Levinson was born after the war; his perspective is that of a grandson to the gangsters, not that of a son or a nephew. If Simon is old enough to have seen the last of the Jewish gangsters, and to have been made to feel some communal responsibility for creating a Bugsy Siegel, Levinson comes at the material in the same way that the rest of us of later generations do. Levinson's question, at last, is: What kind of person was Bugsy Siegel? Simon's question, a question asked by an earlier generation, is: What can Bugsy Siegel do to us?

IV

The ideal history of the Jewish gangster would combine the sociological insights of Thrasher and Joselit with the facts recorded in

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newspapers, court documents, and other contemporary records, and it would season the mix with what remains of the folkloric accounts. It would balance the events of our grandparents' time with the unique pressures they faced. It would not glorify the violence and crime that were, after all, at the heart of their activities, but it would not ignore such things either. It would consider the pain of family members for whom folklore or amnesia is a balm, but it would also be responsive to the interest of a generation trying to recover aspects of a vanished community. It would treat such headline events as shoot-outs and funeral parades, but it would also treat the more mundane elements of gangland politics, such as the way members were recruited, which enterprises were successful for which gangs, what the social costs were in terms of people harmed through earnings lost to gambling or liberty lost to prostitution, and how the gangsters lived with their non-criminal neighbors. It would show the typical gangster to have been a man coming of age in an era when his ethnicity kept him from easily pursuing a reputable career and his talents equipped him for supplying the needs and wants of a community too unfamiliar with America to meet those needs elsewhere.

That ideal history has not yet been written, of course. The closest anyone has come is Albert Fried, whose 1980 work *The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Gangster in America* is the first book I am aware of that devotes itself entirely to this subject. Fried tells the remarkable story of how one figure after another—Monk Eastman, Kid Twist, Big Jack Zelig, Dopey Benny Fein, Waxey Gordon, Dutch Schultz, Lepke Buchalter, and Meyer Lansky—came to dominate the New York underworld. As an introduction to the extent and nature of Jewish gangsterdom, Fried's book has no rivals, but he brings an odd, distracting tone to his work. He uses and reuses such words as *farrago, gehenna, apocalypse,* and *myrmidon* to describe the gangsters and their situations, and he occasionally compares gangland circumstances to Greek drama. When he records Dutch Schultz's being gunned down in a men's room, he writes, "Bugs Workman, now flourishing a .45, ran to the toilet, kicked open the door and shot the Dutchman who, blithely unaware of the commotion outside, of the angel of death closing in on him, was micturating in one of the urinals." Whether such a tone is the product of some unexplained sarcasm or represents an effort to demonstrate academic seriousness in the face of a subject matter that had never before received the treatment he brought to it is impossible to say. In either case, it undermines any understanding he might have brought to the men whose careers he considers.

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Despite its title, Fried's book actually sets out only to record the history of New York's Jewish gangsters. Although Fried makes frequent references to the histories of Philadelphia, St. Louis, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Boston, Detroit, and Cleveland—each of which produced at least one dominant Jewish gang during Prohibition—he never devotes any narrative attention to them. In his brief references to Chicago, it is evident that his chief resource is a notoriously flawed 1931 U.S. Senate–commissioned study of organized crime in Chicago; so flawed is the report that its roster of active criminal figures includes "Nails" Morton and my grandfather, though both had been dead for several years. It may not be Fried's fault that he had to venture so far afield from New York, the area of his expertise; it isn't hard to imagine that some publisher felt "America" in the title would appeal to a broader market than just "New York."

The fact is that gangsterdom was not a national phenomenon; it was a neighborhood one. With no more than a handful of exceptions, Jewish gangsters were limited to the cities in which they arose. They didn't form national cabals; they seized control of local operations. The way to write their history is to write the separate histories of the particular cities that spawned them.

V

The real question is not so much why people have produced flawed histories of the Jewish gangsters, but why they have produced them at all. As Joselit argues effectively in her study, turn-of-the-century Jews actively worked against having that history told because they were aware of the danger the entire Jewish community faced if Jews were reputed to have criminal tendencies. It is probably no accident that we had to wait until 1980 before anyone published a book chronicling the Jewish gangster; the old neighborhood concept of "*a shonder fer de goyim*" ("it's all right for us to talk about it but don't let the Gentiles know") was—and to some extent remains—persuasive. It is far better that we should talk about the good things we have accomplished in America: about our scientists, our entertainers, our political and social activists.

In my own case, after my abrupt initiation, I began to examine the history because it came in such unexpected contrast to the other Jewish history I learned while growing up. The four- or five-generation genealogy I had spent my childhood assembling seemed to me a succession of names of people who had spent their lives looking forward to their great-great-grandson's life in America. Their own histories seemed oppressed and passive; they had worked

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hard and honestly, but they hadn't lived in any way that, with my American sensibility, I could recognize. The Jewish heroes I knew were simply too good to be true: David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Albert Einstein, even Sandy Koufax. All of them were larger than life, good to their parents, and successful because they had astonishing and inimitable talents that they put to the best possible use.

Gangsters were another story altogether. Even the coldest renderings of their doings caught some element of the passion behind the whole business. Arnold Rothstein, the somber-looking gambler who had bankrolled a generation of bootleggers and served as the model for Meyer Wolfsheim in *The Great Gatsby*, had a hand somehow in fixing the 1919 World Series. Lepke Buchalter, who designed the blueprint for the New York area syndicate, unleashed the killers of Murder, Inc., but ended up dying in the electric chair as part of prosecutor Thomas E. Dewey's attempted march to the White House. Jake "Greasy Thumb" Guzik, the ex-waiter and intuitive accounting genius, had grown so close to Al Capone that he actually led the Chicago Outfit for a few years. And Meyer Lansky, a soft-spoken little man, managed to carve out a criminal career as successful as any in the history of the country.

Gangsters suggested a different side of what Jews could be. It wasn't that I had any aspirations for a life of law breaking or thuggishness. It was just that the possibility of something different from what I had known suggested a complexity to my grandparents' world that made them suddenly seem more human. In a lesser way, I was fascinated to learn that the grandmother I had known, who had doggedly and cleverly built her second husband's hole-in-the-wall restaurant into a Chicago landmark, lost more than she should have at the race track. I loved her as much as I ever had, but now I felt at last that I understood her in ways that were impossible when I knew only about her triumphant struggle to make a better life in America for herself and her children. Finding that crime and gangsters were part of living in the old neighborhood served, in part, as an antidote to sentimentality. I don't think I could understand just how remarkable the Benny Goodmans and Justice Arthur Goldbergs of Chicago's West Side were until I knew about the "Nails" Mortons and the Max Eisens as well.

There are still enough people among the Jews who do not want Jewish gangster history to be told at all, so that researching and telling it cannot be merely an exercise in curiosity. Some of the folklore on the subject persists because it is a comfortable way of making sense of painful memories from a difficult era. I've run into wives, children, and brothers and sisters of reputed gangsters who

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refuse entirely to talk about their relatives or who speak of them but ignore the gangster charges. I've known of outraged descendants canceling magazine subscriptions over articles reporting widely documented stories about such family members. A young woman I know once told me that her great-uncle had been murdered during Prohibition and that his brother, her grandfather, had been unable, in the intervening half century, to sort out his anger from his grief. Despite her curiosity on the subject, her grandfather refuses to discuss it at all.

VI

Part of the appeal of the gangster has always been that, because he lives so much of his life in the shadows, the writer, the filmmaker, and the neighborhood schoolchildren are free to make him serve their own needs by inventing what happens in those shadows. The gangster story, in contrast to the gangster history, has often been a wish projection: Billy Bathgate lets E. L. Doctorow step into Dutch Schultz's world and break the code behind Schultz's famous deathbed ramblings; James Cagney's Cody Jarrett in *White Heat* lets everyone watching it thumb a nose at the world and take on the entire FBI. If history has a place in the gangster story, it is generally as a catalyst. The real stuff of the story comes from the imagination and desires of the storyteller.

To Jews of my post-war generation, the attractions of the gangster story are obvious. Excepting news interviews with Israeli soldiers, the primary movie and television reflections we see of Jews are of such neurotic fast-talkers as Woody Allen or Jerry Seinfeld. Next to them, the image of a Bugsy Siegel or a Dutch Schultz can be almost satisfying. Since most of us have achieved a degree of cultural assimilation, the anti-Semitism we see seems no more than a distant or peripheral threat; re-imagining an America where it was once a direct threat carries a thrill that our grandparents probably can't understand. In a time when schoolchildren were harassed on their way to school and when qualified job candidates were not even interviewed on account of their Jewishness, the Jewish gangsters came to seem champions.

It's comforting to learn, as Robert Rockaway reports in his recent *But—He Was Good to His Mother,* that Mickey Cohen in Los Angeles, Davie Berman in Minneapolis, Longy Zwillman in New Jersey, and Bugsy Siegel in his celebrity circles all lashed out at Nazi sympathizers. The historian Walter Roth goes so far as to call "Nails" Morton a *golem* for serving as a kind of monster designed to destroy the en-

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emies of the Jews. Legend holds that young Benny Goodman would never have made it to music lessons at Hull House, at least not with his clarinet intact, if West Side Jewish gangsters hadn't protected him by keeping Polish gangs and others at bay.

Making Jewish gangsters into heroes, or at least emphasizing the role they played in protecting the Jewish community at large, is a strong temptation. I think telling the history of the Jewish gangster plays to that temptation, but it also helps to fill out a broader chapter of the entire immigrant experience. The claim that Jewish gangsters made the streets safe for other Jews means little without the recognition that the gangsters gained the power to accomplish such things by starting as thieves and sluggers. Their use of violence makes sense only in the context of the world they confronted: a world where their Jewishness marked them in different ways than it does now and where they faced both the physical violence of neighboring rivals and the psychic violence of assimilating one culture and leaving another behind.

There is no way to tell the story of the Jewish gangsters without dwelling on the gun fights, criminal alliances, and horrifying crimes they pursued. There is also no way to tell their story without offending some of the people who remember them still and without indulging to some degree in making them into larger-than-life heroes. It makes sense at last, however, to imagine these gangsters as part of the three-generation-long negotiation between a group of Yiddish-speaking immigrants too ignorant to correct Ellis Island officials who had misspelled their names and the American Jews of today. They played their part, not by saving over a lifetime and passing on a dream of a better life to their children, but by taking what they wanted for themselves. They hurt and terrorized more innocent people than history will ever uncover, and they left behind little tangible legacy. Their story still excites because they were the men who answered the violence of a new country, the violence of ethnic rivals, of Al Capone, of even Dion O'Bannion, with violence of their own.

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The Inheritance

DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN

The night his heart stopped, and my father
Drove the Cadillac haywire into a shadow,
Nobody knew where he'd been. A heap of money
Lay strewn across the front seat as if Death
Had thrown it back into his face;
In the ignition dangled his cryptic keys.

My job: to find the locks for those keys
And what they guarded, a puzzle my father
Left scattered in his wake for me to face.
I had to open the doors under his shadow
Though one might as easily open upon Death,
A scene of vengeance, or a vault full of money.

All we ever argued about was money,
His love of it, my disdain. Now the keys
To his kingdom fell to me, as if Death
Longed to cast me in the role my father
Created, while he watched from a shadow
As I fumbled at entrances he refused to face

At the end. Weary, confused, he would not face
Any problem he could not kill with money:
Adoring women, the law's relentless shadow
That trailed him rattling chains and prison keys,
His failing heart, his curious son. My father
Knew he was dying and tried to buy off Death

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With coin of the wrong realm. When Death
Laughed and threw the cash back in his face
It must have been that moment my stunned father
Saw the border of the dominion of money—
And love beyond. Too late to explain the keys
To me as I cried angrily after his shadow,

Too late for me to hear him, once his shadow
Faded into the crowd in the halls of death.
Without a word of advice I got these keys
To a dangerous treasure. I see his lonely face
Smiling upon my grief that all the money
I find won't buy a farewell from my father.

Father, open the door behind the shadow
Money cast between us, and then death;
Face me, bless the bearer of these keys.

✪ DANIEL MARK EPSTEIN's sixth book of poetry, *The Boy in the Well,* will be published in 1995 by Overlook Press. His books of prose include *Star of Wonder* and *Sister Aimee.*

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Mystic Zither

ANGELA S. LIAO

My mother's hands have a life of their own
Her fingers flit quickly from string to string.
Deftly, she presses the thin metal wire with one hand
While plucking it with the other,
Letting the steel vibrate.
I listen as a mystic soul is
Released by her magical hands.
She plays the zither, an instrument of Chinese origin,
Invented by my ancestors centuries ago
But enjoyed in the present.
I watch her soft hands,
Long nails which create music as they
Touch the strings.
Her fingers increase in rapidity,
Then suddenly slow.
In our living room, she symbolizes the glory of existence;
Here she breathes—
With her own rhythm,
With her own tempo.
"Teach me how to live as you do," I think as I watch silently.
She is lost in what she is doing
But looks up suddenly, sensing my presence.
"How do you do it?"
I want the secret of her joy,
But she misunderstands for
She beckons me to sit by her and learn how to play.
Perhaps, though, this is her secret.

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Home Remedies

FLOYD SKLOOT

Diseases desperate grown
By desperate appliance are relieved,
Or not at all.
—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

THE FIRST CALL WAS ABOUT GARLIC. The man said he knew how to cure me. He said that all I had to do was follow his instructions for one month. Thirty days, Fred, he said. *What have you got to lose?*

Because I had published essays and appeared on television talk shows devoted to the subject of my illness, in 1990 I was on my way to becoming a famous sick person. The poet Byron has said "fame is the thirst of youth," but this was not the way my youthful cravings for fame had looked—till my early twenties I had dreams of playing left field for the Dodgers or starring in a string of funny but poignant films. No, I had known for a long time that, as Byron also said, fame was like "climbing up a hill, whose summit, like all hills, is lost in vapor." It was enough for me to be appreciated by whatever readers my poems and novels would find. The dream now was that my old high school classmate Billy Crystal would read one of those novels and decide to make a movie out of it, expanding both my readership and my wallet. However, two years have passed since I sent him the first one, and I am still waiting to hear how he likes it.

My decision to go public with my illness was a very conscious one, but it was not driven by the desire for fame. When I first got sick, my illness was so poorly understood by the public and media, which thought of it as the yuppie flu, and so mishandled by the medical practitioners, who had trouble diagnosing and believing in it, that I felt the need to let them all know what was really involved. I was driven by the desperate desire to communicate.

✪ FLOYD SKLOOT is the author of the novel *Summer Blue* (Story Line Press) and two collections of poems, *Music Appreciation* (University Press of Florida) and *Poppies* (Silverfish/Story Line Press). His work has appeared in *The Best American Essays of 1993* and in the *Atlantic, Poetry*, and the *New Criterion.*

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Doctors now believe that a viral infection I contracted in December 1988 started it all. The infection targeted my brain, diminishing blood flow to the brain stem and triggering an immune system cascade that has not stopped since the winter of 1988. My immune system is in overdrive, chasing a virus that may no longer even be active in my body. At the same time, certain immune system cells—natural killer cells—are weak and ineffective. Old viruses, dormant for years, have been reactivated, and I teem with them. Meanwhile, though I seldom catch colds or the flu, I am at increased risk for lymphoma.

There are anatomical holes in my brain. Memory, abstract reasoning, concentration, balance, coordination, and stamina are damaged. When I talk to people, I look away every few seconds because their physical responses make me forget what I am saying. I do not drive. To stand with my eyes closed is to risk falling, which was how I became aware that—especially at night—I usually pee with my eyes closed. I put newspapers in the refrigerator instead of the recycling sack and am bruised from walking into walls. The so-called flight or fight response is faulty; my body handles stress inappropriately, failing to release the proper level of hormones along its pituitary-adrenal axis. Watching a thriller can actually make my lymph nodes swell and my hips ache. There are strange crimson crescents behind my tonsils. My autonomic nervous system is affected, so I have trouble regulating body temperature, digesting, or remembering to breathe—particularly when I sleep. Because sleep is disturbed, I seldom dream. In conversation, and in the initial stages of composition when I write, I often cannot locate words that are in my vocabulary. There are long pauses while I search for a word, or I become a symphony of malapropisms, given to saying "the charms are burning" instead of "the leaves are turning," or, for reasons I still cannot figure out, I ask my wife to "cross the bristle" over the dinner table. I say our driveway is made of garlic instead of gravel; I did not microwave the oat bran cereal, I xeroxed it. Close, but wrong, as though my brain had been rewired by Gracie Allen.

This is not the way I used to be. At the time I got sick, I was a long-distance runner with a corkboard full of ribbons for my racing, a public policy analyst by day and author by night, the undecorated parent of two teenaged children, and a gourmet chef. No longer. I have chronic fatigue syndrome, a disease whose name is as troublesome as the microbe that causes it. Calling this chronic fatigue syndrome is like calling leukemia chronic bruising syndrome or diabetes chronic urination syndrome.

So, as the man on the phone said, what did I have to lose? He told me to peel a garlic clove by clove and swallow each clove whole until I

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had to stop. Then I should dice the rest into tablets I could gulp down with the help of raw milk. Since a person in my circumstances can never get too much garlic, I should also rub split cloves into the creases of my skin, grind some to a powder I breathe deeply in, take long garlic baths, burn garlic incense, and drink dark garlic tea. I should wear long garlic amulets everywhere. Most of all, what he would really recommend is that I let him come to my house and show me the proper way to use garlic cloves dipped in oil as suppositories.

Within weeks, I was overwhelmed with remedies. A woman who had been ill for nine years wrote to recommend that I begin smoking cigarettes. "I decided that perhaps nicotine would kill the virus," she said, "and started smoking again on the order of a pack a day. I began to recover, and it seems to me that my symptoms worsen when I smoke less." Though she said "It's worth a try," this was one remedy I decided to pass over. Another woman sent me cassette tapes she recorded on using creative imagery to help me overcome the trauma that must be the underlying cause of my ailment. Her wheezy, raspy voice moved me because of the enormous effort that recording these tapes must have taken. Another correspondent wrote to suggest coffee enemas and full spectrum lights, which, she said, "recharge the looker." She also thought I might benefit from taking a certain immune system modulator that she had gotten from her veterinarian. "Think about it," she said. A navy captain took the time to write from aboard his vessel near Nigeria. He recommended a sugarcane rum remedy given to him by a macumba priestess in Brazil. I should take one tablespoon of the concoction after getting up in the morning. Then, he advised, "it might be better to lie down for an hour. It is a mighty powerful drink." He also advised me to brush my teeth when the hour was up. Since alcohol intolerance is strongly associated with chronic fatigue syndrome, I regretfully set this suggestion aside. Another potable cure was recommended by a man who had treated his hepatitis in 1945 with daily draughts of fresh lime juice. When he first got sick, his liver was so swollen that he could feel it pressing against the bottom of his heart and his blood turned the color of urine. Then he found lime. "A virus," he said over the phone, "has a hard time standing up against lime juice." He has had no colds or flu since the end of World War II, his blood pressure is below normal, and his daughter has been on limes since she was weaned. "It was better for her than any vaccine."

According to my notes, by the time the calls and letters tapered off, I needed to quit sugar, vinegar, dairy, bread and flour products, corn, caffeine, alcohol, and chocolate. Some of these, of course, I also needed to consume in increased amounts. Fruit was out because

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the worst thing for me was too much acid. Anything that eats outdoors is polluted, so I had to quit meat, fish, and fowl. I had to move. I had to sleep both less and more. I needed to have all the fillings removed from my mouth and be cleansed. I needed to see a hair analyst. I needed my head examined. *It's better than nothing.*

There is no doubt in my mind that most of these people contacted me with the best of intentions. Even the independent distributors trying to sell me herbal nutrition products or their unique liquid compound—a secret blending of flowers, foliage, roots, and berries of rare botanicals—were probably motivated by a desire to help. People often sent blessings, along with their deeply felt empathy and an outpouring of personal stories that clutched the heart. Sick people seemed driven to reach out to a fellow sufferer. I came to understand the existence of a vast subpopulation of Americans who feel betrayed by doctors and who seek one another as though they were members of a scattered tribe. Taking matters into their own hands, they are fervent in their outreach, proselytizing like evangelists while expressing their anger at failed bodies and failed expectations of the almighty doctor. "You are a voice in the wilderness crying out," one man wrote, "not for repentance, but a warning that an illness approaches and we need to be called to arms." Revealing myself as sick was tantamount to inviting them all into my life.

Though their calls and letters were meant to be helpful, the cumulative weight of them was staggering. Let me make it clear that I did not go on television requesting advice about how to cure myself. I did not write essays in which I announced my desperation and offered my phone number. Despite the absence of any known drug therapy for chronic fatigue syndrome, I have not reached the end of my faith in Western medical science. Yet the suggestions poured in as though I'd run an ad in the personals section.

I heard endless variations on the theme of "it's worth thinking about," often intensified by a version of "desperate straits require desperate measures." I think these notions all go back to the Father of Medicine, Hippocrates, one of whose aphorisms was: "For extreme diseases extreme strictness of treatment is most efficacious." True enough, but for those with extreme diseases for which there are no treatments, how do you decide which suggestions to try? Certainly drinking a moderate amount of lime juice daily would not hurt me. According to the literature on natural healing, there was something medicinally potent in garlic, in herbs, in certain oils. I had been receiving regular massage therapy since before getting sick. How do you sort the helpful from the hooey, the genuine from the bogus? When nothing your doctor tries to do is of use, how do you define

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extreme? How do you decide when it is time to buy Marlboros and dip the garlic in safflower oil?

I had a runty beagle named L.C. who was a great comfort to me in the early years of my illness. Like me, she was shorter than most of her breed and ran with legs churning at a frantic clip; a romantic, she believed in the possibility of true love and conducted her life accordingly. L.C. would jump into my lap to sleep while I lay on the recliner, her chin on my belly, eyes occasionally opening to check me out to see whether I needed anything. I was sure she would get me a glass of lime juice if I asked her to—after all, she could already open the refrigerator to raid it for leftovers. So when I got a letter from a man who signed himself L. C. Young, it seemed like an omen. I ought to listen to what he had to say.

But then, he did not actually want to say what he had to say. L. C. Young was one of the many inducers, like the garlic man, people whose letters left it up to me to get in touch with them if I truly wanted to get better. They said they had the secret, but the next step was mine and a letter was no place to reveal such information. I might ignore them at my own peril, and generally did. L. C.'s fancy letterhead implied that he had serious scientific knowledge and was connected to a company immersed in study and analysis, though it did not specify of what. The logo, meant to suggest state-of-the-art capability, was of gold-embossed chevrons beside the gyroscopic symbol of an atom with its nucleus being orbited by whirling electrons. He said he'd "been in research some thirty-six years now and can show you things you dare not print."

He wrote, "I want to offer you the answer to your problem. I ask no fees. I do expect expenses if you want me to drive to your city." Of course, he would be glad to see me in his city too, if that was the way I wanted to handle things.

Another inducer offered to meet me at his sick daughter's support-group meeting and reveal "the miraculous cure that's turned her around." Another wrote to the editor of a magazine in which one of my essays appeared, telling her that his wife had chronic fatigue syndrome too. "I stumbled on a cure that made her well; it has nothing to do with drugs or medicine nor does it involve anything radical, it's just a plain natural method that will restore a person suffering from this problem back to normalcy and good health." I also received a comic drawing of Superman gazing out at me, with the words "Oh Floyd" floating above his spit-curled head. A message below the drawing said, "If you want to correct your imbalance, call me and I will explain what I do." Two people from Manhattan's Upper

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East Side, self-confessed workaholics, wrote to tell me about two unnamed practitioners—one a biochemist, the other "not a quack"—who successfully treated their diseases but with whom it was "very difficult to get an appointment."

Occasionally contact would come from someone who threatened to be aggressive if I did not do what I was told. In September, as my fourth year of illness was coming to an end, I got a letter from a woman I will call Willa Quincy. She informed me that two years earlier she discovered she had thick blood when she cut her finger and it would not bleed. In an effort to thin her blood, she tried aspirin and vinegar but disliked their side effects; she was afraid to try salt because of its reputed connection to hypertension. After a year, feeling she had no other options, Willa made "the best choice of my life" and began salting her food. "Now," she said, "when I have an injury I bleed beautifully!" She was convinced that thick blood caused poor circulation, which in turn accounted for the brain abnormalities in my so-called disease, which she felt to be a shameful hoax. Salt deficiency rather than "some non-existent virus" was my problem!

Willa also enclosed a letter she had written to the professional golfer Curtis Strange. After seeing him complain on television about his health, she recommended that he take salt. At the bottom of the letter, she noted that he was playing great golf again in Canada and had stated in an interview that he felt much better. She did not say whether Strange attributed his improvement to salt, though I would be a fool not to see the connection. She also enclosed a copy of a letter she had sent to the national Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome Association in Charlotte, North Carolina, saying that those of us who spoke for others claiming to have chronic fatigue syndrome had better stop deceiving innocent victims or Willa would have no choice but to intervene. "If you have any moral values, you would notify all of your group leaders about their salt deficiency and assure them that they need not fear dropping dead from high blood pressure if they use salt."

When I did not write back to Willa, she began calling me.

I returned from a trip to the Oregon coast to hear her voice on my answering machine.

"Mr. Skloot, pick up the phone," she said. "I took the trouble of writing to you about your health; now if you're as sick as your article claimed, I know you must be there." After a few seconds of silence, and in a voice now resembling a Rottweiler's, she said, "Pick it up—I'm calling long-distance!" I could hear her breathing and then growling in exasperation before saying to someone in the room with

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her, "Can you imagine the nerve?" before slamming down the phone.

I re-read her letter and was interested to see that she had listed the symptoms from which salt had helped her recover. "To name a few, some are insomnia, lassitude, inability to concentrate, lack of drive, kidney problems, hair loss and personality disorder (hostility)." Maybe it was time for her to increase the daily dosage.

When she called the next time, I was expecting to hear from my publisher, and I answered the phone on the first ring. I had begun screening my calls because of the amount of time unsolicited health-related messages were demanding, but, on that morning, anticipation had gotten the better of my good judgment.

"Why didn't you answer the phone Saturday?" she asked. This was like talking with my mother.

"I appreciate your taking the time to get in touch with me," I said, using my canned speech, "and I'll think about your suggestions."

"Did you try the salt yet?"

"No, Mrs. Quincy, I haven't."

"Well, why not?"

"You see, I'm under a doctor's care . . ."

"Did he tell you not to? They all do that, you know, but it's a myth about salt causing high blood pressure. You do what I said, and you'll be fine in a week."

"Thank you, Mrs. Quincy. I appreciate . . ."

"And I expect you to write about it too. I want to see you use your gifts to stop this terrible hoax. It's a responsibility you have; you can reach so many people."

"I don't write very much . . ."

"Oh, I get it. You want to be sick, don't you. You like just sitting there collecting your disability and doing nothing all day. I know your kind of man, Mr. Skloot . . ."

I let her go on for another minute or two, inserting an "I appreciate your taking the time" and a "thanks for your interest" here and there. But it was clear she would continue berating me until she got my commitment to become the official voice of the Salt Movement. I hung up on her—politely, of course—and was amazed when she never called or wrote again.

Now I take eleven pills with breakfast every morning: a powerful multivitamin; a couple of hefty vitamin C tablets; tablets for vitamins E, B complex, and A and D with beta-carotene; two mineral mixes that include magnesium and zinc; chelated electrolytes; and enzyme CoQ 10. From time to time, when I see convincing evidence that a remedy was successful in alleviating symptoms like mine, I add it to

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the cornucopia, regardless of where the suggestion came from. For instance, after a friend in Chicago sent me a sheaf of relevant health studies, I began taking two tablespoons of flaxseed oil, followed by a quarter cup of nonfat cottage cheese until the mere sight of the containers in my refrigerator was enough to make me barf. For a while I tried B-12 nasal drops, which oozed bright red into my mustache. I eventually added extra garlic to the menu. For the last year, I have been taking a series of homeopathic remedies.

In 1991, a woman who consumed huge doses of vitamin C every hour called me from New York to talk about the color of my urine. She described hers in vivid detail, noting that it varied from bright lemon to chartreuse if she was taking too much vitamin C, but she had learned how to adjust her intake according to the hue. Saffron was no good—I should definitely worry if my urine turned saffron. But amber was fine and so was bisque—a color I simply could not visualize for urine without panic.

A man who was tired all the time, just as I was, took massive amounts of vitamin C and was now running marathons again. A woman wrote urging me to go to the Fred Meyers grocery store in her neighborhood to "buy their powdered vitamins plus a book on feet and find what magic will do on your feet."

Then I got a call from Ursula Osnabruck who said that, at age fifty-four, she cured herself in a few hours. She had experienced the same symptoms I had described in my article, even down to losing her curls. Her doctor told her it was menopause. But then she found out the truth: for ten years she took vitamins and that's what made her sick.

"Vitamins rev the motor," Ursula told me.

She and her husband lived on an organic farm, grew all their own food, took wonderful care of themselves. She took vitamins, he did not, and only she got sick. It was because vitamins deplete you of minerals. She stopped taking vitamins and calcium, began taking small amounts of trace minerals, and there was a noticeable change within hours.

"I'm not a crackpot," she whispered. "I'm a member of Mensa."

I did increase my daily dosage of vitamin C to 4000 mg. But if there is not even a consensus about the value of vitamins, how was I supposed to figure out the issue of magnetism? I got more suggestions regarding electromagnetic fields, biomagnetism, and the presence of electronic appliances in my life than on any other topic. We do not yet understand enough about magnetics to grasp how they affect our biological functioning, but it is clear that an association exists. Writing up a prescription for managing it, however, is another matter.

"Kick off your shoes and get grounded!" one man wrote. He said

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fatigue is a matter of having excess electrical energy in the body, which needs to be grounded in order to get rid of that excess. His advice was to walk outside in the sun, feet bare to the grass, dirt, or sand. Sand would be especially good because walking in it builds up the calf muscles. He also recommended deep abdominal breathing while I was outside.

However, being outside, according to several other advisors, would be the death of me. Did I live near a power substation, a microwave tower, electric power lines, radar? Deadly, they said. And indoors was even worse; I was probably besieged by electromagnetic energy with my television, radio, video display terminal, toaster, oven, hair dryer, maybe a home photocopier and fax, an electric blanket in the winter. No doubt I exposed myself to microwaves several times a day too. The only wonder was that I had not gotten sick sooner.

A retired naval officer explained where all the biological and electrical chaos was coming from. Sure there was electromagnetic pollution and excessive reliance on power-driven apparatus, but to believe that was the real problem was to miss the point. Did I not know about the Soviet death grid over America? Was I not aware that they were conducting secret electromagnetic warfare against the United States, destroying our immune systems and mutating our genes and reactivating dormant viruses? There were plenty of reports about this, most of which he sent to me. He also urged me to "study the 13th chapter of Book of Revelations Holy Bible-Christian where this power from heaven is given to Gog-Magog by the Dragon." I might also use the enclosed form to buy a Teslar wristwatch, just the thing to combat electronic smog, and I should think about wearing a double-ended quartz crystal about my neck.

As a kind of countercharge to these letters, a man in Portland, Oregon, where I was living at the time, sent a packet of information and offered to sell me the Bio-Magnetic Mattress. Great, I could pay to expose myself to additional amounts of magnetic poison. "Heal yourself with nature's energy," he urged. I settled down to read the literature he had sent, but it was difficult because he only included odd-numbered pages. However, I was familiar enough with the work of Robert Becker and Paul Brodeur to know that there were apparent links between electromagnetic pollution and biological malfunction in humans. Given the conflicting reports about electromagnetic fields, I was not convinced that buying a Bio-Magnetic Mattress was the solution for me, though it did promise to balance things out. Magnetic acupuncture, which the man also suggested, didn't seem like the solution either. I did, however, buy an extra foam mattress pad to ease the pain in my pelvis.

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I tentatively ventured out of the mainstream. Over the years, I had tried everything that traditional medical doctors could think to try—immunoglobulin shots, naltrexone, low-dose anti-depressants, a host of sleep and pain medications, muscle relaxants, antibiotics, immune boosters, and anti-virals. There were letters from physicians recommending additional therapies that my own physicians had not used, and I explored those, too. One physician considered chronic fatigue syndrome a neurotransmitter and imbalance problem complicated by what he called "an overlay of justifiable depression," so he suggested a specific drug I had not used before. Another wrote to say that one of his patients was helped by a duet of anti-depressants taken in tiny doses, one at 9:00 A.M. and the other at 9:00 P.M. On the other hand, a nurse who had worked in hospitals and physicians' offices for sixteen years wrote to advise me of the limitation of medicine. She said that I should stop worrying about doctors, purge myself of all toxicities, and attend a "Sick and Tired Seminar." After all these resources had been exhausted, and after participating without benefit in the clinical field trial of an experimental drug, I turned at last to the alternative medical world, the naturopaths and homeopaths, the non-traditional practitioners that so many of my unsolicited advisors urged me to consider.

I had gotten an inquiry from a "Counselor and Healer" who said he used "energy balancing, assisting many people to get in touch with their own healing abilities." He had an offer for me. "Would you be willing to allow me to work on you at no charge? If you receive benefit from the work I do, I would appreciate your helping me to edit my book and to assist me by writing some articles when you are strong enough." There were similar calls from two doctors of naturopathy, who practiced classical homeopathy as well as food, environmental, and chemical allergy desensitization. I finally chose to see a woman recommended to me by someone I had known for many years, a friend who also had chronic fatigue syndrome and swore that Dr. Lucy Forrest had helped her.

According to Ted J. Kaptchuk's classic book on Chinese medicine, *The Web That Has No Weaver*, "The Western physician starts with a symptom, then searches for the underlying mechanism—a precise *cause* for a specific *disease*." Although that disease may, like mine, affect various parts or systems of the body, it is viewed as a self-contained phenomenon, and the diagnosis concentrates on "an exact, quantifiable description of a narrow area." Kaptchuk concludes that the physician's logic is analytic, seeking "to isolate one single entity or cause." In contrast, the Chinese medical practitioner looks at the whole individual, body and mind. What is sought is "a pattern of

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disharmony" that describes "a situation of imbalance" rather than a specific disease or cause. "One does not ask 'What X is causing Y?' but rather, 'What is the relationship between X and Y?'"

I lay on the examining-room table looking at charts of the human body decorating the wall. The bodies were crisscrossed by a network of lines and diced into color-coded meridians. There was soft, new age music, and the lighting was dim. Soon Dr. Lucy Forrest stood at the foot of the table, extended her hand to help me sit, and began asking questions. Her eyes were obviously where all the light in the room had gone. She looked at me more probingly than most Western doctors had touched me. If nothing else, I certainly felt that I had been heard.

She asked me to lie down again and began feeling my pulse for a very long time, nodding, frowning, looking at the charts on her wall. She asked about my body heat, the nature of my sleep, the daily arc of my pain. Then she held a series of small bottles over my chest, saying she was allowing my body to select among the remedies she was considering.

Over the next six weeks, once a week, I went to her for acupuncture treatments and for adjustments in my mix of remedies. I tried a variety of substances with wonderful names—Minor Blue Dragon for my continuing flu symptoms; Astragalus 10 for immune deficiencies; ground thyroid; Major Four herbs, which is a sort of ginseng tonic; and something else that had the consistency of sand. The acupuncture tended to leave me utterly exhausted, and I felt no positive change in my symptoms, except when I came to her with a headache, which the needles seemed to shatter like a pane of glass. The various potions also produced no noticeable effect. When I stopped seeing her, Dr. Forrest said I had not given her enough of a chance, which may well be true. But at the time, all I knew was that I seemed to be getting worse, and my faith in alternative healing was not yet strong enough to keep me there.

Three years later, I am firmly entrenched in both camps. I seem to have gradually absorbed many of the suggestions my correspondents offered. While seeing my traditional physician once every three months or so, undergoing regular laboratory exams, and keeping up with the latest research in drug therapies, I am also considering the most exotic alternative treatment yet: Panchakarma, which is part of India's Ayurvedic, or traditional natural healing system. "Panchakarma," explains Deepak Chopra in his best-selling book *Perfect Health*, is "a systematic treatment for dislodging and flushing toxins from every cell, using the same organs of elimination that the body naturally employs—sweat glands, blood vessels, urinary tract, and intestines."

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So it has come to this: Home remedies serve as a kind of mortar between the bricks of Eastern and Western medical practice that provide me shelter during illness, a scaffolding of hope built in large part from material provided by people I have never met, and the growing wisdom to adopt selectively the posture recommended by the Brethren of the Sick around the country. (*It's worth a try.*)

I am about to embark on a trip to Vancouver, British Columbia, so that I can subject myself to panchakarma's several steps. I will put out my digestive fires by eating clarified butter; flush my intestinal tract with laxatives; loosen toxins and profoundly relax through the experience of extended massage and the dripping of warm, herbalized sesame oil onto the forehead; rid myself of impurities through herbal steam baths; take enemas to flush out what the other treatments loosen; and inhale medicinal oils or herbs to clear and drain sinuses. If it works, maybe I'll write a letter to someone whose plight I read about in a magazine.

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Eminent Victorianism

What Lytton Strachey Hath Wrought

RICHARD D. ALTICK

One of the most engaging of all the anecdotes relating to the early reception of famous books is the scene in the Brixton prison, south London, in the spring of 1918, when a controversial public figure, serving time for a political offense, exploded in laughter over a newly published book he was reading. His laughter was so loud, he recalled some years later in a radio broadcast, that "the officer came to my cell, saying I must remember that prison is a place of punishment." The guffawing convict was Bertrand Russell; the book was *Eminent Victorians*, by his friend Lytton Strachey. The sensation it caused marked the only time on record that a single 350-page book turned an entire past society into a laughingstock in the estimation of a new one.

Scion of an upper-middle-class family, member in his youth of a coterie of brilliant Cambridge undergraduates, presenting a distinctly odd appearance (emaciated frame, reddish beard, congenital shortsightedness, plus high-pitched voice), Strachey possessed a keen mind, a gifted style, and an ambition that was undiminished by his chronic invalidism. At thirty-eight he was well known for his numerous literary essays in intellectually fashionable periodicals and for *Landmarks in French Literature* (1912), a small, sparkling gem in a popular home-study series. He was also known as a central figure in the tiny modernist oligarchy called the Bloomsbury Group. With the publication of *Eminent Victorians*, he achieved instant notoriety—and enthusiastic acceptance on the part of many—as a joyous iconoclast whose shattering of customary assumptions was to require a serious effort in damage control. The book provocatively raised two seemingly unrelated issues, one literary, the other historical: How should biography be written? and What sort of people were the Victorians? In its wake, neither the demanding and now topical art of biography nor the public idea of the Victorians and their age would ever be the same.

Eminent Victorians was a boldly innovative book, owing little to any model except the eighteenth-century French *mémoire* and the slender English tradition of Jonsonian "humors" and the ensuing genre of Theophrastan "characters," profiles of human types that dwelt on a single moral or psychological trait. It was composed of four miniature biographies, of Henry Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Thomas Arnold of Rugby, and General Charles ("Chinese") Gordon—a Roman Catholic prelate, a sentimentally idolized female humanitarian, an educational reformer with a pronounced moralistic bent, and a military adventurer—representatives of four widely separated spheres of Victorian endeavor. All had earlier been the subjects of admiring biographies, but Strachey treated them instead in the form of caricatural case histories: Manning as an obsessive ecclesiastical opportunist, the redoubtable Nightingale as a workaholic driven by ruthless devotion to duty, Arnold as a zealous, pompous public-school headmaster who tended to confuse himself with God, and Gordon as a religious fanatic and dipso-

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maniac, alternating between Bible and brandy bottle.

Strachey's aim was explicitly literary—to redeem the art (or, as his friend Virginia Woolf preferred, the craft) of biography from the incubus of late Victorian hagiography. He expressed his derision in words that were soon famous: "Those two fat volumes with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead—who does not know them, with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design? They are as familiar as the *cortège* of the undertaker, and wear the same air of slow, funereal barbarism." Strachey was not the first to complain that writers (often, more accurately, scissors-and-paste compilers) of tributes to deceased Victorians, grieving widows and piety-stricken sons in particular, were mausoleum builders rather than skilled portraitists and narrators. One of the most frequently cited examples of the type at the turn of the century had been Hallam Tennyson's bulky biographical eulogy of his late father, the poet laureate. Tennyson performed his task, as did other biographers, in vivid remembrance of the furor over James Anthony Froude's four-volume life of Thomas Carlyle a decade earlier (1882–84). Froude, a friend and disciple of the conscience and scourge of English society, had dared to portray Carlyle as he really was—an extremely difficult man to get along with, selfish, grim, irritable, subject to fierce outbursts of wrath against his much-enduring, spirited wife. This was not the idea the public held of the old man, whose eightieth birthday had been a national occasion. For his calamitous indiscretion Froude was unmercifully pilloried in the press and reviled by Carlyle's family. No biographer following him was likely to risk a similar expiation.

With Hallam Tennyson's biography and other such works in mind, the critic Edmund Gosse had several times protested the tyranny of biographical adulation and its necessary companion, reticence. In a review that was destined to take its place in anthologies of "notorious literary attacks," William Ernest Henley said of Graham Balfour's family-sponsored life of Robert Louis Stevenson—a confectionery image could serve as well as a mortuary one in such a context—that in Balfour's decorous pages his old friend was depicted as "an angel clean from heaven, and I for my part flatly refuse to recognise it. . . . This Seraph in Chocolate, this barley-sugar effigy of a real man . . . is not my old, riotous, intrepid, scornful Stevenson at all."

Eminent Victorians was meant to reverse the polarity of life-writing. Strachey demonstrated how easy it was, in the developing climate of cynicism at the end of the war, to replace uncritical censer-swinging with indiscriminate ridicule. His manner might well have been called Bloomsbury chic: his assumption of superiority, his self-conscious cleverness, his eagerness to discover the absurdity that lurked behind pretension. Strachey's book also reflects the deepening awareness, in those years when Freudianism had begun to pervade advanced thought, that appearances are deceptive, that to pierce to the truth of character the biographer was obliged to strip away the moral mask his subject wore before the world. Without adopting specifically psychoanalytic concepts, but assuming an Olympian pose of omniscience such as no earlier biographer had ventured to do—neither Samuel Johnson nor James Boswell nor any subsequent biographer—Strachey professed to isolate a single driving motive in persons whose makeup in reality had at least a normal share of human complexity.

Strachey's limitations were initially obscured by the success with which he manipulated his readers, beginning with the ironic "Eminent" of his title. He constantly resorted to fictional devices such as staged scenes, imagined interior monologues and conversations, and dislocations of time. He cultivated a trick of seizing incongruous details from his sources (he admitted to having invented only one, Dr. Arnold's short legs, which he used to devastating effect) and ripping phrases from their contexts, in the interest of both comic ambiguity and innuendo. Even his confessions of ignorance on a certain point were merely tactical, again to serve the purpose of sly innuendo: "What if—?" Above all there was his beguiling prose style, extravagantly admired by some: so carefully wrought, with its plethora of loaded rhetorical questions. It was, someone was later to remark, an exceptionally bad style for telling the truth.

But truth-telling was Strachey's only avowed aim. With breathtaking disingenuousness, he asserted that he aspired "to lay bare the facts

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of some cases, as I understand them, dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions." He did not mention that such an ideal of calm objectivity had governed English history-writing since the mid-Victorian era, when the principles of the so-called scientific historiography, based on the assumption that truth could be told only if its teller stuck to the documented facts and eschewed artifice, had been imported from Germany. Gosse's and Strachey's diatribes against the late Victorian and Edwardian monuments that passed for biographies simply meant that the "official" biographers had not learned from the historians, or that the pressures of conformity were more compelling than the attractions of truth-telling.

Readers seduced by Strachey's cleverness seem to have been indifferent to the intellectual dishonesty involved, if indeed they were even aware of it. Effects reinforcing the chosen simplistic theme were everything; scholarly responsibility counted for nothing. Yet Strachey knew what it was to be a painstaking scholar; he had written a weighty Cambridge dissertation on Warren Hastings, and he fancied himself an academic manqué, never forgetting the blow his pride had suffered when he failed to win a fellowship at his beloved university. In composing *Eminent Victorians* over a period of five years, he initially made great claims for the amount of research he was doing. "I sit here buried in books on Cardinals and Theologians," he wrote a friend while working on the "Manning." But in practice he relied heavily on the "standard" lives of his subjects, and these, like Graham Balfour writing his *Stevenson* from the sources, he used with great license, selecting and tampering with the data to conform to his fixed idea of his subject and going so far as to suppress contrary evidence and falsify quotations. Strachey made no strenuous efforts to search out primary documents. As the American historian Carl Becker once said of him, he worked "without fear and without research."

The most immediate result of the splash *Eminent Victorians* made was the advent of what reviewers called "the new biography" or, less flatteringly, "the jazz age biography," fizzing with colorful personal details, imagined scenes, purported psychological insights derived from letters or thin air, and illusive intimacy, as when one biographer of Matthew Arnold called that exponent of high seriousness "Matt" from cradle to grave. To describe these hastily concocted and well-seasoned snacks for the mind, a word was borrowed from H. L. Mencken's America, where the vogue was even more rampant: "debunk" (v.), defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* thus: "To remove the 'nonsense' or 'false' sentiment from; to expose (false claims or pretensions); hence, to remove (a person) from his 'pedestal' or 'pinnacle.'" Bernard De Voto, dispensing with the cautious qualifiers, called debunking "the high-spirited game of yanking out shirt-tails and setting fire to them."

Not all the biographers belonging to the post-Stracheyan school—in England, "Hugh Kingsmill" (H. K. Lunn), Philip Guedalla, and Hesketh Pearson; in France, André Maurois, whose romantic biography of Shelley achieved the improbable feat of omitting to mention that he was a poet; and in Germany, Emil Ludwig—were debunkers. Authors of "popularized biography," another new term, might treat their subjects with unaccustomed vivacity and still respect them. Their Stracheyanism was most apparent in their indulgence of the imagination, either to supply gaps in the record or to make a better story than the record allowed.

One side effect of the liberation of biography from the constraints of privacy was that it struck fear into the hearts of living older authors who would themselves, in the natural course of events, be the subjects of full-dress biographies, and, beholding what the most emancipated of Strachey's disciples had wrought, sought to control their own posthumous image. More than one critic recalled that long ago, early in the eighteenth century, it had been said of "the unspeakable Curll," an unprincipled London printer-bookseller who kept a stable of hacks busy writing catchpenny and largely fictitious lives of all manner of men and women, that he had caused biography to add a new terror to death. Seeking to forestall future Stracheys, the last surviving eminent Victorian, Thomas Hardy, ghosted his own biography, presenting himself as he wished to be remembered. It was published shortly after his death under his widow's name; the deception was not known until a Yale scholar, the late Richard L. Purdy, discovered it a number of years ago.

Strachey's camp followers found it easy

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enough to imitate his mannerisms and rhetorical tricks, but none of them came even close to acquiring his suave skill. *Eminent Victorians* was not a model for general use, and although the modern reader is repelled by the deliberate distortion of evidence, the factitious sophistication and studied irreverence that are the hallmarks of those hundreds of biographies written to cash in on the book's fame, they at least set an impressive example of what life-writing should not be. It was their practice, as well as *Eminent Victorians* itself, that touched off what might be called The Great Biographical Debate. The sporadic critical chatterings that in the past century had been evoked by the publication of important or at least news-making life histories now gave way to a critical discussion of the principles and methods of biography that has been sustained for seventy-five years, on grounds that have not so much been fundamentally altered as modernized. The latest stage of the debate was marked by Janet Malcolm's lengthy attempt in *The New Yorker* in 1993, over the unquiet grave of Sylvia Plath, to isolate the "philosophy" of the art (what kind of reality can biography describe?) from the conflicting personal interests of a writer's relatives, friends, and biographers.

The running symposium had a healthy ripple effect. It obliged working biographers to consider more seriously what they were doing: how much they owed to the memory of their subject and to his survivors, and, in the other direction, to their readers; how to maintain a balance between the recital of fact and artistic effect; how to handle personal details and how much background to paint in (and know when enough was enough); how to use documents without violating their integrity; how, in short, to exercise the selectivity, the detachment, the instinct for design that Strachey had found so lamentably absent from the commemorative biography. Today's best examples, whatever their subjects, owe much of their high quality to the professional standards developed across the years and to the self-criticism and cautious experimentation that the critical discussion encouraged among practitioners.

It was under the auspices of biography that the redemption of the Victorian age began. The questions that were tossed back and forth during the debate were pertinent, of course, to any modern culture in which the recording of significant lives flourished. But the debate had originated in a book specifically about four disparate Victorian figures, whom the public quickly took to be typical of their age. Strachey had made no such extrapolation publicly, although privately he had exclaimed to his brother James in 1914, while working on his "Nightingale" profile, "What a crew they were!" Had he not been bent on destroying the mortuary biography of his own time, he might just as well have exercised his temperamental iconoclasm on earlier false gods. (Why not *Eminent Men of the Renaissance? Eminent Augustans? Eminent Romantics?*) But it was Victorians that Strachey ridiculed, and the unanticipated consequence was that in response to his gibes a major new field of historiography sprung up.

The hostile tone of *Eminent Victorians*, as well as the feverish response to it, can be variously explained. The Bloomsburian David Garnett once said that "Lytton's essays were designed to undermine the foundations on which the age that brought war had been built." *Eminent Victorians* reflected the disillusion that was widespread as the First World War dragged to an end in a wasteland of blasted hopes and meager promise. The cynicism harbored by the intelligentsia to which Strachey belonged found a scapegoat close to hand in the generation of politicians and statesmen and the establishment they represented—late Victorians (born before 1901) to a man—whose blundering had drawn the nation into a calamity of unspeakable cost to their children and grandchildren. The Victorians' legacy to the brave new world had, to borrow an image Carlyle and others had favored in their time, the bitterness of Dead Sea apples.

In all this, there was a discernible whiff of Oedipean resentment and denial. Two memoirs, Samuel Butler's thinly fictionalized *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) and Gosse's own *Father and Son* (1907), had caused a stir by their candid rendering of parent-child relationships that were painfully at odds with the Victorian domestic ideal. (Later, in *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf would describe her liberation from the spiritual dominance of her father, the patriarch not only of his family but symbolically, as the first editor of the sixty-three-

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volume *Dictionary of National Biography*, of the biographical profession as well.) Strachey had the same rebellious inclination. *Eminent Victorians* could be read, on one level, as a covert attack on his own family, presided over by a line of senior administrators, which had failed to respond to the changing mood and so typified many of the haute bourgeoisie from which he and the other Bloomsberries sought to detach themselves. The violent revulsion from ancestor worship, it seemed, ended in denigration.

But personal resentment, whether focused or diffused, was not the only cause of the anti-Victorian reaction. Long before Strachey was born, dissidents had participated, often uncomfortably and sometimes influentially, in Victorian public life. Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, Ruskin, William Morris, even Dickens in his reformist mood had constituted the Victorian permanent opposition. The aesthetic movement that began in the 1870s had challenged the Victorian premise that beauty was inseparable from morality, and the very name applied to the counterculture of the 1890s, "the decadence," suggested a pronounced deviation from orthodoxy. A great deal of what was thought and said in the closing years of Victoria's reign and the ensuing Edwardian years was evidence of the declining prestige of Victorianism. In their various ways, three of the most prominent pre-war writers, George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and G. K. Chesterton, were critical of many aspects of Victorian thought. As early as 1904, in *The Poet's Corner*, Max Beerbohm, who was to become one of Strachey's admirers, guyed Victorian eminences in caricatures: a complacent Browning taking tea with his odd fan club, the Browning Society; Tennyson, in a vast room in the palace, declaiming *In Memoriam* to his queen in her widow's weeds, a portrait of her late sainted consort looking down; Matthew Arnold, leaning against a mantelpiece and grinning a horrible, toothy grin as his little niece, the future Mrs. Humphry Ward, asked, "Why, Uncle Matthew, Oh why, will not you be wholly serious?"

Strachey's biographer, Michael Holroyd, perhaps exaggerated when he declared that "the only reproach that can be brought against Lytton Strachey . . . is that he desiccated the corpses after the tempest had blown them from their gibbets." *Eminent Victorians* unquestionably ushered in the most virulent phase of anti-Victorianism. It provided a burning glass to concentrate the previously scattered rays of the rebellion, thereby initiating a process that led in time to the systematic study of the age, no longer yesterday but the (sixty-four-year-long) day before yesterday, as a distinct period in history, to be examined with the same inquiring spirit and with the same instruments as were applied to the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the eighteenth century.

Until this happened, most of what was written about the Victorians in the 1920s and 1930s was either superficial or misinformed or both. The Victoriana offered to the public consisted mainly of chatty, often inane, reminiscences and memoirs of unimportant Victorian survivors and books on the social history of the era. The latter was a topic that was gaining antiquarian interest as the present beheld the past slipping further and further away from personal memory into the impersonal store of historical documents and artifacts. The centenary in 1937 of Victoria's accession to the throne witnessed a great outpouring of fluff, shot through with nostalgia and notably lacking in thoughtfulness. There was little sign as yet that the Victorians were about to be taken seriously—that behind the comedy act was to be discovered a society characterized by powerful thought and infinite complexity.

The tide turned first in literary studies, although none of Strachey's infamous four was a literary figure. The late Victorian popular veneration of Browning and Tennyson had persisted down to Strachey's time, even though critical opinion had turned against the latter. The new literary temper was evident in T. S. Eliot's reluctance to admit how much his poems owed to Browning's dramatic monologues and even more in W. H. Auden's remark that Tennyson "had the finest ear, perhaps, of any English poet; he was also undoubtedly the stupidest; there was little about melancholia that he didn't know; there was little else that he did"—literary Stracheyanism in a nutshell.

Now, one by one, the Victorian writers were examined afresh and the received canonical hierarchy revised. The foundation for critical reappraisals was laid by scholars applying the methods of scientific historiography to the materials of biography. Beginning in the forties, innumerable caches of personal documents, in both private and institutional hands,

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became available. One memorable instance out of many was the success Gordon N. Ray, later to be president of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, had in gaining access to the Thackeray family papers, which enabled him to compile a four-volume edition of the novelist's letters and then to write a two-volume biography. Literary biography thus was rewritten, or in some cases written at length for the first time, on the solid and greatly widened basis of documents.

A formidable stream of meticulously edited collections of letters, indispensable to the writing of definitive biographies, flowed from the scholarly presses: those of Tennyson, Macaulay, George Eliot, FitzGerald, Newman, Meredith, William Morris, Rossetti, Walter Pater, Lewis Carroll, and more besides. Some, issued serially, are today far from completion. The most recent volume, the seventh, of the Pilgrim edition of Dickens's letters, with its encyclopedic array of explanatory notes, reaches only to 1855, with fifteen years to go. The two other big projects of the kind, each of which will run to thirty or forty volumes, are the Edinburgh-Duke edition of the letters of Thomas and Jane Carlyle and the edition of the Brownings' correspondence, financed on a shoestring and issuing from an obscure publishing house in Kansas. The forty-fourth and last volume of the latter is tentatively scheduled to appear in the year 2009.

Editors and biographers benefited from the steady liberalization of the "public right-to-know" doctrine that has in recent years been denounced in some quarters as catering to voyeurism. One effect of Stracheyan biography and the increasing climate of tolerance was to free the art of biography from the informal censorship of parties intent on suppressing any information about a writer that did not harmonize with the controlled image or went counter to prevailing morality. In 1917, the year before *Eminent Victorians* was published, Gosse prepared, and deposited in the British Museum library against the day when it could no longer shock, a memorandum of all he had learned of the poet Swinburne's sexual proclivities but was not free to include in his biography. The day came in 1960, possibly sooner than Gosse expected, when Cecil Lang was able to print the memo in his edition of Swinburne's letters.

In 1949, Sir Charles Tennyson, the poet's grandson, broke the longstanding embargo on a family secret, the gloom of the remote country rectory where the future poet laureate and his neurotic siblings had grown up under the domination of an alcoholic, almost deranged father. Revelation of the circumstances of Ruskin's non-consummation of his marriage and of Dickens's having possessed a mistress stirred controversy in their time, but the world viewed with equanimity the more recently divulged details of the unmarried novelist Wilkie Collins's having maintained two mistresses, one living in his home and the other, with his children, a few blocks away.

Strachey was not interested in the social and cultural environment that had helped shape his subjects' characters, and in any event the miniature dimensions of his portraits prevented him from addressing the question. But now the scope of scholarship on Victorian authors was enlarged to include the conditions in which they pursued their profession—the history of publishing, the emergence of a mass reading public and the resulting expansion of the market for books, the proliferation of periodicals serving every conceivable interest group, and the sub-literature that had never before claimed serious attention. For the sake of a well-rounded picture, the popular culture of print began to be studied side by side with literature in the old belletristic sense.

The academic industry devoted to Victorian literary biography was part of a much larger undertaking that eventually was to illuminate all areas of Victorian life and cleanse the word *Victorian* of the jokey connotations acquired in the years when *Eminent Victorians* defined the image of the age. Once the cadaverous ghost of Strachey had been exorcised, probably in the 1950s, specialists began to weave a seamless web of historical knowledge that embraced everything the Victorians did and stood for. The method of operation followed the pattern being set in other disciplines, the sciences as well as the humanities: individual effort was supplemented by cooperation in the form of several learned journals, innumerable special-interest newsletters, professional societies and support groups that met at annual conferences and interim symposia. Under the same impetus, centers were established for Victorian research in general—one at Indiana University, another at Leicester University in England—and others for work

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on particular figures—such as the Tennyson Research Centre at Lincoln, the Disraeli Project (its official name) at Queen's University in Ontario and its Gladstonian counterpart at Oxford.

The interdisciplinary tendency of Victorian scholarship was typified by two of the most seminal works in the field. Walter E. Houghton's *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1957) described some of the most influential elements in the intellectual atmosphere that affected literary expression. Houghton argued that the most comprehensive appreciation of Victorian ideas and attitudes could be obtained from the periodicals that were the prime receptacles of the age's thought, especially in the "higher journalism" to which several of them were devoted. He therefore conceived and supervised, often under discouraging circumstances, the editing of the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* (five weighty volumes, covering forty-three reviews and magazines, 1966–89). Houghton and his fellow editors accomplished what may have been the most impressive modern feat of collaborative scholarly detective work, identifying the authors of some 86 percent of the 89,000 articles, 90 percent unsigned, in the periodicals indexed. In addition to being one of the most underfunded scholarly projects of our time, the *Wellesley Index* has the distinction of being the last to be completed without electronic assistance.

The scope of the *Index* gave some indication of the sheer quantity of material available to scholars. The historian Kitson Clark once declared, without exaggeration, that the raw data comprised "a larger mass than exists for any country in any previous century," including visual documentation: the Victorians were the first to leave behind a photographic record of themselves. The long shelves of periodicals, now disintegrating thanks in part to Victorian papermakers' confidence in the permanence of cheap ingredients, had their counterparts in the millions of pages of manuscripts owned by university and research libraries in Britain and the United States—the British Library, the Oxbridge libraries, the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library, Yale, Harvard, and many more besides.

The production of books and articles mounted at such a rate that scholars could no longer pretend to master the annual flow. In the decade 1965–74 alone, some 18,000 titles were listed in the annual bibliography that recorded current activity in the field, and the number increased in every subsequent year. The centennial of *The Origin of Species* in 1959 was marked by literally hundreds of publications on Darwin and his works. Other aspects of Victorian science, little noticed in the Stracheyan years, were intensively studied, as well as the development of technology, the history of business enterprises in such significantly Victorian areas as engineering and manufacturing, transport history, economic history, and—of particular relevance toward the close of the twentieth century—the emergence of the city as a political, economic, and social phenomenon and a looming symbol of the human condition in the industrial age. To the existing body of imperial histories, as the Raj faded and the Commonwealth replaced the empire, were added numerous volumes exploring the hitherto relatively unexamined annals of the Victorian presence in Australia and Africa.

One class of eminent Victorians had engaged the interest of historians even before the term was on everyone's lips: the great politicians from Melbourne to Gladstone. The ponderous six-volume biography of Disraeli by William Monypenny and George Buckle (1910–20) was a notorious example of how stodgy the life of so colorful and problematic a politician and prime minister could be made to seem in industrious but inept hands. From the 1920s onward, as the surviving participants dropped from the scene, the tangled political history of Victoria's long reign was reexamined with a detachment and an authority that were now possible for the first time. Following the queen's death in 1901 there had been a spate of sedulously discreet memoirs of various members of the court. It may or may not have been in response to Strachey's comparatively respectful biography of Victoria (1921), which disappointed readers looking forward to the Stracheyan irreverence toward four commoners repackaged as lèse-majesté, that the locks were gradually, selectively, removed from the royal archives and collections were published of the queen's letters, the political ones in the 1920s, the personal ones somewhat later. Perhaps the thinking in the palace was that the wisest way to fend off the sharks of post-Stracheyan biography was to

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throw some food to the document-hungry historians who, in their circumspect way, preferred fact to fancy.

Of all the manifestations of the Victorian spirit that were studied from the 1940s onward, the most visible were the age's architecture and art. The Victorians had built imposing monuments to themselves, not only civic statuary but public buildings that were exuberant, ornate, and eclectic (only one style was missing, and that was an indigenous one). These were the stone, brick, and mortar counterparts of the biographies Strachey despised. When large numbers of them, including quintessentially Victorian warehouses and office blocks, perished by enemy action in London and the provincial cities, the war-stressed nation had more urgent matters to occupy it than regret over their disappearance. But it was a measure of how far tastes had changed that only a few years later—when a protest was mounted against the planned destruction of two London landmarks, the Coal Exchange and the Doric arch in front of Euston station—the developers, although eventually successful, got a good contest for their money. The subsequent formation of a society to protect "listed" Victorian buildings, inspired by the scholarship of Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Nikolaus Pevsner and Sir John Betjeman's affectionate partiality, at least gave the preservationists some muscle in their perennial struggle with the destroyers.

In the four decades after the appearance of *Eminent Victorians*, the reputations of the most popular Victorian painters, whose work had commanded high prices from wealthy patrons in their time, plunged to their nadir. (The one exception was Turner, whose art was discussed throughout these years with considerable respect if not the admiration it now commands.) Victorian canvases were so little regarded that secondhand dealers could not even give them away, except to impecunious artists who could paint them over. From the mid-1960s onward there was a remarkable revival of interest in Victorian art, beginning with several eye-opening exhibitions of Pre-Raphaelite work, which were accompanied by scholarly catalogues. Within only ten years or so, art historians, and critics in their turn, rediscovered numerous artists, some famous in their time, such as Etty, Dyce, Maclise, Mulready, Frith, and, of course, Landseer, and rescued others from the obscurity in which they had always dwelt. Initially their paintings' importance was primarily historical, as visual documentation of the Victorian scene and Victorian taste; in due course, their intrinsic aesthetic worth was detected, their market value soared, and they were given pride of place in the Tate and several provincial galleries. Collectors were attracted: Allen Funt, the entrepreneur of the television show *Candid Camera*, once amassed a collection of paintings by the late Victorian Alma Tadema, and it is said that Andrew Lloyd Webber now owns the most valuable collection of Victorian art in private hands. In the 1950s there was no such person as an art historian or a dealer specializing in the Victorians; today there are scores.

Unlike the sciences, where pure research often can be proved to have had practical spin-offs in everyday technology, the influence of scholarship in the humanities upon the society that has nurtured it can seldom be measured. Yet it must be more than coincidental that nowadays the Victorians figure so prominently in our thought and experience. Mark Girouard's writings on the Victorian country house and other buildings, illustrating the close connection between architecture and social history, have reached a wide public. Adaptations of Victorian novels, the latest of which has been the BBC's much praised *Middlemarch*, have repeatedly been successful on television and film.

And who can say how much of the rejection of Margaret Thatcher's homilies on "Victorian values" as the panacea for Britain's malaise a decade ago could be traced to the filter-down influence of historical scholarship? Some of the public, at least, had enough acquaintance with the realities of Victorianism to realize that, whatever the intrinsic virtue of those "values" might be, they were mislabeled. Shibboleths they were; it was harder to prove that they were Victorian shibboleths unless severely qualified. But the very fact that Mrs. Thatcher invoked them as such was an indication of how radically the image of the Victorians has been altered since Strachey demeaned it to general applause. Then, the Victorians—stupid (like Auden's Tennyson), parochial, philistine, complacent, prudish—seemed to be beneath contempt. Now, they are apotheosized in a fashion, not only for political purposes.

Today, it is *Eminent Victorians*, not the Victo-

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rian mode of civilization, that is discredited. As a literary work it is almost unreadable, except as a curiosity. One is struck not by Strachey's once admired urbanity and elegance but by his pose as a middle-aged enfant terrible, his obsession with meretricious effects, and his astonishing predilection for clichés (not, I think, to be explained away as part of his ironic strategy). What once were the sophisticate's delight, Strachey's quick thrusts of a lethal rapier, now are seen to be nothing more than cheap shots aimed at straw figures. Yet, distortions and all, the stereotype his book generated has proved to possess inordinate staying power. Even one whose first acquaintance with the Victorians was derived from the book—many years after it was first published—has to admit that the image developed during a long career immersed in the records they left behind retains troubling nuances of Stracheyism.

The productivity of the scholarly industry that Strachey unwittingly brought into being supplies the crowning irony. "The history of the Victorian Age," the preface to *Eminent Victorians* began, "will never be written: we know too much about it." This was a clever paradox, characteristic of Strachey in both its attention-grabbing audacity and its false premise. It was less successful as prophecy.

Francis Steegmuller

1906–1994

Contributor, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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Magic

DAVID N. MOOLTEN

She wanted more out of life
Than her father could give, more
Than the thick knobs of his hands, more
Than his breath of warm stout, more
Than one room and three sisters
With whom she shared it, more
Than how he died: a fireman, but not
In a burning house. Cancer drew him
Over its own slow coals. She wanted
Paris, a husband with ambition—
Maybe a surgeon—enlightened children,
Magic.

Other times she grew wistful
Fanning out a stack of Polaroids
Like a deck of cards
To pick as if by sleight of hand
The one some stranger snapped
The night her father pulled a small girl
Pale as a rabbit from the flames.
He stood for the flash as he always stood
In life, blackened and amazed
Like some stage magician
Whose trick had exploded harmlessly
In his face. It was then
That her heart understood
What it could not understand—
An illusion so grand it mystifies
Even the wiliest conjuror or physician.

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MUSIC

Maurice Ravel

ARBIE ORENSTEIN

Although Paris was the artistic hub of Maurice Ravel's career, he frequently left that capital city to return to his tranquil birthplace in France's Basque country. Located at the southwestern tip of France, the tiny village of Ciboure is just across the bay from Saint-Jean-de-Luz and is a short distance from the Spanish border. Here, at 12 rue du Quai (now Quai Maurice Ravel), Joseph Maurice Ravel was born at 10:00 P.M. on March 7, 1875. The following day the infant's birth was duly recorded at the town hall of Ciboure, thus producing the first document to bear his name. His parents, Marie Delouart (1840–1917), of Basque origin, and Pierre Joseph Ravel (1832–1908), a Swiss civil engineer, had been married in Paris on April 3, 1873. Born of Catholic parents, the infant was baptized at the local parish church of Saint Vincent, and some three months later the Ravel family moved to Paris, where Marie gave birth to a second son, Edouard (1878–1960), who would follow in his father's footsteps as an engineer.

Maurice Ravel's attachment to his mother was undoubtedly the deepest emotional tie of his life. Among his earliest memories were the Spanish folk melodies sung to him by his mother, and through her he inherited a love of the Basque country, its people, and its folklore, as well as a deep sympathy for the music of Spain. Madame Ravel, a devoted wife and mother, was also something of a freethinker—another trait among many transmitted to her elder son. When an old friend of the family tried to "convert" her, Maurice explained the outcome as follows: "Mama cooled this noble zeal considerably by stating that she would prefer to be in hell with her family, rather than in heaven all alone." Ravel venerated his mother, and her death proved to be a blow from which the composer never fully recovered.

The origins of the Ravel family have been traced back to Collonges-sous-Salève, a village in France's Haute-Savoie. During the latter part of the eighteenth century, one François Ravex or Ravet (the name was apparently written both ways) lived in this village, and it appears that the name Ravel came about from a subsequent misreading of the final *t* in Ravet. His son, Aimé Ravel, was born in Collonges-sous-Salève in 1800, but moved to Versoix, in the canton of Geneva, and later became a Swiss citizen. Pierre Joseph Ravel, one of five children, was born in Versoix, and although he was to pursue a career as an engineer, the father of Maurice Ravel was keenly interested in music. He possessed an inventive, inquisitive mind and played a pioneering role in the developing European automobile industry. Pierre Joseph frequently took his sons to visit factories of all sorts, and both boys were fascinated with the machines they saw and the sounds they heard. From his father, Maurice appears to have inherited a healthy, open-minded curiosity about all aspects of life and a serious interest in precision craftsmanship.

The Ravels were a liberal, sensitive, and devoted couple. The family's means appear to have been modest but adequate, and when it became clear that the elder child would pursue a career in music, he received unqualified encouragement and support. Maurice Ravel

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was fortunate enough to have a happy childhood, and there would be no crisis over a choice of career: it was to be music from the very beginning, and the only question was whether he would pursue a career as a concert pianist or a career as a composer.

Ravel's formal education appears to have been limited to his early piano lessons, and, later on, his music studies at the Conservatoire, which took place intermittently between the ages of fourteen and twenty-eight. Whatever he knew about French literature, history, science, etc., he learned almost entirely through his own efforts. While showing some natural talent as a composer, he was often reluctant to practice the piano, and an occasional parental bribe was required to keep him at the piano when it was more inviting to play in the streets of Montmartre. Nevertheless, on November 4, 1889, the young Maurice managed to pass the Conservatoire's piano entrance examination. As it turned out, his long apprenticeship was largely marked by one academic failure after another. Yet his career as a student was one of immense growth, and it was against the backdrop of the Conservatoire that Ravel passed from adolescence to maturity. Here he met many musicians and made many lifelong friends from among both students and professors. At the Conservatoire, he methodically analyzed the standard masterworks of the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic periods, and he performed a wide variety of nineteenth-century piano music. If Ravel's knowledge of European music from Gregorian chant through the seventeenth century was relatively limited, he became acquainted with an enormous amount of music written during his lifetime, much of which is now forgotten.

Ravel's private activities during his student days are best described in the extraordinary journal of his friend Ricardo Viñes. Both youngsters had an insatiable curiosity, and while their mothers conversed in Spanish, they played through an imposing variety of piano four-hand music, both original works and transcriptions, ranging from Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Franck, through Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Borodin, Glazunov, Chabrier, and Satie. After classes, the boys would take long walks or play games of all sorts, copy out poetry, make drawings, attend concerts, or visit art galleries. On August 15, 1892, the young pianists spent virtually the entire day at the piano "experimenting with new chords." The results of these and other discoveries were revealed in the "Habanera" for two pianos, completed in 1895, in which Ravel boldly affirmed his musical predilections for sophisticated harmony, sensuality, and Hispanic dance rhythms. Around this time, too, he made the crucial decision to devote himself to composition. In addition to his hard-won maturity as a composer, any hopes he might have entertained for a career as a concert pianist were thoroughly dashed, not only by the greater proficiency of Ricardo Viñes, but by other exceptionally gifted pianists at the Conservatoire.

About 1900, the nucleus was formed of a group of enthusiastic young devotees of the arts who called themselves the *Apaches.* The name was coined by Ricardo Viñes; rather curiously, it refers to underworld hooligans. To some extent the young men considered themselves "artistic outcasts"—needing to defend what they considered important, whether or not the public agreed. The *Apaches* were ardent supporters of Claude Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* during its stormy infancy, and faithfully attended recitals of contemporary music. The group met far into the night, discussing painting, declaiming poetry, and performing new music.

The coterie, which met fairly regularly until the outbreak of World War I, was an extremely important influence on Ravel. Not only were his own intellectual horizons broadened, but it was at the *Apaches* meetings that he met many of his future collaborators and lifelong friends. The *Apaches* had their own secret theme song (the opening of Borodin's Second Symphony), their own nicknames (Ravel was called "Rara"), and even their own phantom member "Gomez de Riquet," a character invented by Ravel as a pretext for leaving a tedious rendezvous or a dull evening party. The poet Léon-Paul Fargue recalled that "Ravel shared our predilections, our weaknesses, our manias for Chinese art, Mallarmé and Verlaine, Rimbaud and Corbière, Cézanne and Van Gogh, Rameau and Chopin, Whistler and Valéry, the Russians and Debussy." Amid this atmosphere of mutual encouragement, Ravel first performed his *Jeux d'eau,* "Oiseaux tristes," and the Sonatine. Fargue's matinal arrivals at the meetings, generally about 1:00 A.M., signaled the closing of

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the piano lid, but the discussions would continue with renewed vigor.

The richness of French musical life at the turn of the twentieth century is seen in the fact that two distinct schools of composition were vying with each other for musical leadership. The older school consisted of César Franck's followers, headed by Vincent d'Indy; the leader of the newer, progressive element was Claude Debussy. Nor should one overlook the subtle elegance of Gabriel Fauré, the neoclassical art of his teacher Camille Saint-Saëns, and the pathbreaking experimentation of Erik Satie. Ravel, who was thirteen years younger than Debussy, was immediately classified as one of his followers. In addition to the heated battles of the critics, French audiences did not hesitate to jeer or applaud during the performances of contemporary music, and a combative spirit filled the concert halls.

While the Société Nationale de Musique, founded in 1871, presented a wide variety of contemporary French music, the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, founded in 1828, generally performed works from Bach through Wagner. Owing to important advances in musicology, the vast treasures of Gregorian chant and of Renaissance and Baroque music were becoming accessible and were featured at the important concerts of the Schola Cantorum, directed by Vincent d'Indy. In the opera house and the concert hall Wagner reigned supreme, and virtually every aspect of French cultural life felt the striking influence of the Bayreuth master. Along with the ever-popular French operetta, the operas of Massenet, Meyerbeer, Mozart, Puccini, and the nineteenth-century Italian school were often performed, and in 1904 the one-thousandth performance of Bizet's *Carmen* was given at the Opéra. The Colonne, Lamoureux, and Pasdeloup orchestras frequently programmed works by Beethoven and Wagner, and generally emphasized the music of the Viennese Classical school and the Romantic era. Among the many outstanding younger recitalists of the day, one could hear Pablo Casals, Alfred Cortot, Arthur Rubinstein, and Jacques Thibaud.

On March 7, 1905, Ravel celebrated his thirtieth birthday. In his student days he had grown a mustache, to which were added sidewhiskers and a dark, neatly trimmed beard. He was slender and short and always elegantly dressed. Despite the strong reservations of many conservative professors and music critics, and the largely negative opinions of Vincent d'Indy and his followers, Ravel was known as one of the leading composers of his generation and was generally considered the foremost successor to Debussy. At this point, he was encouraged by Debussy himself and was supported by Gabriel Fauré, his former composition teacher, as well as by several important music critics.

The fifth and final episode in Ravel's fruitless attempts to win the Prix de Rome—France's most important award for young composers—produced one of the most spectacular scandals in the annals of the Conservatoire. After examining his fugue and choral piece, the jury solemnly declared that the composer of *Jeux d'eau* (1901), the String Quartet (1903), and the song cycle *Shéhérazade* (1903) lacked the technical proficiency to be a finalist in the competition. Ravel's disqualification was not only hotly debated by music critics, but the ensuing *affaire Ravel* turned out to be front-page news in the French dailies. Another scandal erupted when it was disclosed that all of the six finalists were pupils of the same professor of composition—Charles Lenepveu. Ravel protested that Lenepveu, a professor of composition at the Conservatoire, was a member of the jury. In addition to the personal charges and countercharges, the entire curriculum of the Conservatoire was sharply attacked. Théodore Dubois resigned as director and was replaced by Gabriel Fauré.

At this stormy juncture, Ravel accepted a timely invitation from his friends Alfred and Misia Edwards to join them aboard their luxurious yacht *Aimée* for an extended vacation in Belgium, Holland, and Germany. In August 1905, he wrote to the Parisian hostess Madame René de Saint-Marceaux, summing up his mood with unusual candor.

> I saw unforgettable things in this marvelous situation. During all of this time I didn't compose two measures, but I was storing up a host of impressions, and I expect this winter to be extraordinarily productive. I have never been so happy to be alive, and I firmly believe that joy is far more fertile than suffering. It's an opinion as valid as any other. We'll see this winter if I was mistaken. While awaiting the pleasure of bringing you the fruit of these considerable labors, I would be very happy to hear from you.

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Ravel's letter reaffirms his marked ability to judge himself impartially, and his observation that "joy is far more fertile than suffering" offers an important clue to his personal and artistic temperament. As it turned out, not only was the winter of 1905 rich in achievement for him, but the period preceding World War I proved to be the most intensely productive in his entire career.

The 1905 Prix de Rome fiasco marked an important turning point in Ravel's life. Gone forever were academic fugues, dull cantatas, and sterile battles with conservative and reactionary juries. Looking back on his career, Ravel might well have been amused at its paradoxical aspects. At the Conservatoire, he had received a first prize as a pianist (with second prize in the July 1891 competition going to Alfred Cortot!), but never as a composer. Moreover, some of his most avowed opponents on the Prix de Rome jury had in fact catapulted him to fame and had also caused the collapse of the conservative-reactionary element at the Conservatoire.

In the fall of 1905, Gabriel Fauré assumed the directorship of the Conservatoire, and owing to a program of bold reforms, a renewed sense of dedication and enthusiasm filled the classrooms. At this time, Ravel accepted an exclusive contract from the publisher Durand, which included an annuity, and this close association would last throughout his lifetime. He now completed the Sonatine and *Miroirs* (1905), the *Histoires naturelles* (1906), *L'Heure espagnole* and the *Rapsodie espagnole* (1907), *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), *Ma Mère l'Oye* (1908–1910), *Valses nobles et sentimentales* (1911), *Daphnis et Chloé* (1909–1912), *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1913), and the Trio (1914). He also composed a handful of minor works, completed several acts of an unfinished opera (*La Cloche engloutie*—based on a libretto by Gerhardt Hauptmann), and carried out several transcriptions.

During this period, Ravel's music began to extend far beyond the confines of the Société Nationale de Musique: the Sonatine was heard in Lyon, the *Rapsodie espagnole* was introduced at the Concerts Colonne, and various works were performed throughout western Europe, the United States, and North Africa. With a performance of the *Rapsodie espagnole* at an important festival of French music held in Munich (1910), the première of *L'Heure espagnole* at the Opéra-Comique (1911), and the creation of *Daphnis et Chloé* by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (1912), Ravel's reputation as one of France's leading composers was firmly established.

As he had often done before, Ravel spent the summer months of 1914 in the Basque country, taking long walks, swimming, boating, and visiting with friends. He was working on a trio for piano, violin, and cello when the guns of August announced the end of an epoch. At age twenty, Ravel had been exempted from military service because of a hernia and general weakness, but now, at thirty-nine, he was determined to serve his country. He was torn between patriotism and curiosity for adventure and the terrible thought of leaving his aged mother. On August 4, 1914, he wrote to his close friend Maurice Delage: "If you only knew how I am suffering! If I leave my poor old mama it would surely kill her. . . . Yes, I'm working; and with an insane certainty and lucidity. But, during this time, the blues are at work too, and suddenly I find myself sobbing over my sharps and flats! . . . This has been going on for 4 days, since the tocsin."

Following several abortive attempts to enlist, Ravel finally joined the Thirteenth Artillery Regiment as a truck driver in March 1915. Some duties were extremely hazardous, involving the transportation of war materiel at night under heavy enemy bombardment, and on several occasions near the front at Verdun, Ravel came within inches of losing his life. Above all, he was obsessed by his mother's failing health and the frequent lack of news from friends. His own health had deteriorated sharply: he suffered frequent insomnia and poor appetite and finally underwent an operation for dysentery in September 1916.

Following a satisfactory convalescence, which was largely spent devouring book after book, Ravel suffered the deepest grief of his entire life. On January 5, 1917, Marie Delouart Ravel died at the age of seventy-six. The immediate effect of this tragedy was some three years of silence with regard to composition. From 1920 until his swan song, *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée* (1932–33), this once fecund composer produced only an average of one composition a year.

Following a difficult period of postwar adjustment, Parisian musical life returned to its former vigor and diversity. While the Co-

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lonne, Pasdeloup, and Lamoureux orchestras emphasized the works of Wagner, Beethoven, Saint-Saëns, Franck, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mozart, Berlioz, Mendelssohn, and Debussy, the Société Musicale Indépendante, founded in 1910, played an active role in presenting contemporary music. Along with festivals devoted to English and American music, Arthur Honegger, Albert Roussel, and Arnold Schönberg participated in special recitals devoted to their works. Under Ravel's leadership as vice president and later as president, the Société Musicale Indépendante introduced the works of many younger composers, among them Paul Hindemith, Jacques Ibert, Darius Milhaud, and Joaquín Turina. At the Opéra, the works of Wagner and Meyerbeer continued to be popular, and in 1925 the fifteen-hundredth performance of Gounod's *Faust* was given.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Ravel divided his time between Paris, the Basque country, his increasingly frequent concert tours, and his new villa in Montfort l'Amaury, a sleepy village some thirty miles west of the capital. Le Belvédère (literally "the beautiful view") provided a quiet, country atmosphere conducive to work, with Paris easily accessible by bus and train. Now located at 5 rue Maurice Ravel, the villa is a national museum open to the public. The home has been preserved exactly as Ravel left it, and it offers some important insights into the composer's personality: a Japanese garden, many Japanese prints, an Arabic coffee set, showing his penchant for the exotic, and finely wrought bibelots, mechanical birds, music boxes, and carved statuettes, showing his predilection for perfectly crafted miniatures of all sorts. In the study, adjacent to the Erard piano and the composer's desk, there is a fine portrait of Madame Ravel painted by her brother-in-law Edouard, and a portrait of Pierre Joseph Ravel by Marcellin Desboutin.

To these small, immaculately polished rooms, which were tended by his faithful housekeeper Madame Reveleau, who had served the Ravel family for many years, the composer added his Siamese cats, upon whom he lavished loving attention. Ravel's mischievous humor often came to the fore when guiding his friends through the villa, for when his guests gazed in admiration at a "rare" Monticelli, he would enjoy informing them that it was an imitation. Indeed, throughout the villa, there is a curious juxtaposition of rare authenticity and flagrant pastiche, together with an aura of make-believe enchantment not unrelated to the exoticism of *Shéhérazade* or the childlike humor of *L'Enfant et les sortilèges.* The library contains about one thousand volumes and reflects the composer's demanding taste as a bibliophile. Many rare, beautifully bound editions are there, among them the complete works of Balzac, Hugo, La Fontaine, Molière, Proust, Racine, and Voltaire, as well as many books that reflect Ravel's interests in gardening, travel, general history, interior decorating, animals, and personal grooming. Despite a large collection of scores from Bach to Schönberg, there are relatively few books about music.

From the balcony of Le Belvédère one gazes upon a breathtaking view of the flowing countryside of the Île-de-France. Friends and colleagues occasionally gathered at the villa for a Sunday afternoon luncheon in the garden, and the day would often end with a long walk in the nearby Rambouillet Forest, where Ravel was intimately acquainted with every birdcall and every byway.

The isolation of Le Belvédère and the tranquility of the Basque country were offset by innumerable social and professional engagements in Paris. In the postwar years Ravel was forced to adjust to a new, uncomfortable situation, in which he was no longer a member of the avant-garde, but rather a follower of the trends set by Schönberg, *Les Six,* Prokofiev, and others. Some of the new sounds in the air were those of jazz, polytonality, and atonality, as the lush velvet of impressionism gave way to the hard steel that had been prophesied in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring.* Many composers were turning to a spare texture, in reaction to the mammoth orchestrations of Wagner, Mahler, and Strauss. The postwar years presented many fresh challenges. Ravel listened a great deal, absorbed much, yet composed with difficulty, as the following chronology indicates: Sonata for Violin and Cello (1920–22); *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* (1920–25); *Chansons madécasses* (1925–26); Sonata for Violin and Piano (1923–27); the two piano concerti (1929–31). (The *Bolero* was composed between July and October 1928, but Ravel acknowledged that it was "an experiment in a very special and limited direction.")

Although not an outstanding pianist or con-

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ductor, Ravel was increasingly in demand as an interpreter of his music. He concertized on several occasions in Austria, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland, and appeared in Germany, central and eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Scotland, and North America. Outside of Paris, he performed most often in London, where his music was particularly well received by the public and press.

Ravel's international reputation reached its zenith in 1928 as a result of his four-month concert tour in North America. The critics were lavish in their approbation and the audiences enthusiastic. At an all-Ravel program given by Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall, the entire audience stood up and applauded as the composer took his seat. Deeply touched by this spontaneous gesture, Ravel turned to Alexandre Tansman and observed, "You know, this doesn't happen to me in Paris." Although the itinerary was exhausting, he managed to rest on the long train rides that brought him to some twenty-five cities from New York to California and from Canada to Texas. Among the many highlights of the trip were an excursion to Niagara Falls and a visit to the Grand Canyon, whose majesty and beauty Ravel found overwhelming. He was fascinated by the dynamism of American life, its huge cities, skyscrapers, and its advanced technology, and he was impressed by its jazz, Negro spirituals, and the excellence of American orchestras. American cuisine was apparently another matter: "I am seeing magnificent cities and enchanting regions," he wrote to the violinist Hélène Jourdan-Morhange, "but the triumphs are exhausting. In Los Angeles, I slipped away from the people; besides, I was dying of hunger."

Before leaving for North America, Ravel had promised to compose a ballet for Ida Rubinstein. During a brief vacation in the Basque country, just before going for a morning swim, he poked out a melody on the piano with one finger. "Don't you think this theme has an insistent quality?" he asked his good friend Gustave Samazeuilh. "I'm going to try and repeat it a number of times without any development, gradually increasing the orchestra as best I can." The ballet soon became extraordinarily popular, much to the surprise of its composer, and to this day the *Bolero* remains an international best-seller. Shortly after completing the *Bolero*, Ravel appeared in academic garb at Oxford University, which conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Music, *honoris causa*. A concert tour in Spain and brief visits to Geneva and Bordeaux rounded out a year of extraordinary activity.

In the early months of 1929, Ravel participated in several festivals of his music given in England, Switzerland, and Austria, and following all of these exhausting travels he looked forward to a long vacation. After many years of periodic insomnia and occasional bouts of neurasthenia, he found it more difficult than ever to undertake fresh projects. Since 1928, a piano concerto in G major had been contemplated as well as an opera, *Jeanne d'Arc*, based on the novel by Joseph Delteil. Work on the concerto was interrupted by a commission from the Austrian pianist Paul Wittgenstein, who had lost his right arm in World War I. Fascinated by the challenge of writing a concerto for the left hand, Ravel completed the work in roughly a year. The Piano Concerto in G Major was finally introduced in Paris on January 14, 1932, with Marguerite Long as soloist and Ravel conducting. A few days later, disobeying doctor's orders, the composer undertook a taxing three-month tour with Madame Long, performing the Concerto in some twenty European cities from London to Bucharest. In London, Ravel shared the podium with Malcolm Sargent, and in Bucharest he was received in private audience by the royal family and decorated by King Carol II.

Following this highly successful tour, Ravel returned to the Basque country for an extended rest. Two recent commissions were being contemplated, a ballet for Ida Rubinstein, *Morgiane*, based on the tale *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, and music for a film, *Don Quixote*, with Feodor Chaliapin in the title role. While only fragmentary sketches of *Morgiane* were committed to paper, the music for *Don Quixote* proved to be the composer's swan song. The final song, based on the rhythm of the Spanish *jota*, ends with the words "Je bois à la joie" (I drink to joy). Ravel bade farewell to his art with an homage to the Spain of his fantasy.

If his art terminated in a mood of carefree joy, Ravel's final years proved to be poignant and tragic in the extreme. While vacationing at Saint-Jean-de-Luz in the summer of 1933, he found it impossible to coordinate his motions while swimming, and encountered unusual difficulty in writing. His physicians

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spoke of cerebral anemia, mental fatigue, apraxia, the inability to perform purposeful movements, and aphasia, involving difficulty in speech and a partial loss of memory. Ravel appeared overworked, exhausted, and, of course, fearful of this ominous development. One of the last letters that he was able to write was sent on March 12, 1934, to his childhood friend Marie Gaudin. Its conclusion is heartrending: "Write me sometimes. I will try to answer you although it costs me entire days of torture to do so; I began this letter over a week ago." One can only admire Ravel's indomitable courage as he undertook the Herculean task of relearning the letters of the alphabet. His efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, and the few letters written during the last three years of his life were all dictated.

Although Ravel spoke with great difficulty, and at times appeared oblivious to his surroundings, at other times he was painfully aware of his helpless condition. "I can still see him at Montfort l'Amaury," Hélène Jourdan-Morhange recalled, "seated in an armchair on the famous balcony whose view he loved so much with a distant, forlorn gaze. . . . I became uneasy and asked: 'What are you doing there, dear Ravel?' He replied simply, 'I am waiting.'" Ravel was indeed waiting for nothing less than a miracle, which, sadly, never came to pass.

During the autumn of 1937, Ravel's health deteriorated sharply, and on December 17 he was admitted to the clinic at 12 rue Boileau in Paris. After much agonizing deliberation, Edouard Ravel and the composer's closest friends decided to risk a delicate brain operation, which was performed by the celebrated surgeon Dr. Clovis Vincent. No tumor was found, and Dr. Vincent succeeded in equalizing the level of the cerebral hemispheres, one of which had become depressed. Two days after the operation, Ravel was asked if he would like to see his brother. He promptly replied, "Ah! Yes indeed!" These were apparently his last words before lapsing into a coma. His cruel four-year agony finally came to an end during the early morning hours of December 28, 1937.

The death of Maurice Ravel brought innumerable expressions of grief, particularly in Europe and North America. Among many others, Milhaud, Prokofiev, and Stravinsky acknowledged the passing of a master musician. A simple burial service took place on December 30 in the presence of a large gathering of friends and colleagues. During the brief civil ceremony, a eulogy was delivered by the Minister of National Education, Jean Zay, who spoke on behalf of the French government, and following the service burial took place at the cemetery in Levallois Perret.

During Ravel's lifetime, his music was performed throughout Europe, North and South America, and from North Africa to the Orient. His career intersected with those of many outstanding personalities of the day—Ansermet, Bartók, Casals, Debussy, Heifetz, Monteux, Nijinsky, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams—the list could easily be extended. Granted honorary awards and citations by universities, ministers, and kings, Ravel had a brilliant career, rich in achievement. Behind it all lies the subtle complexity of the man.

Ravel's physical appearance was striking. To his colleague and biographer Roland-Manuel, Ravel resembled a jockey, and Colette compared him to a squirrel. His short height (about 5 feet, 3 inches) and light frame (about 108 pounds) were notable, as were his bony features and his gentle, mischievous brown eyes. After experimenting with a mustache, side-whiskers, and a full beard, he became clean-shaven from about the age of thirty-five, and his dark brown hair slowly changed to silvery white. At the time of *Daphnis et Chloé*, Madame Nijinsky described the composer as "a charming young man, always a little extravagantly dressed, but full of gaiety." Ravel's dandyism included wearing the latest fashions in clothing. He was among the first to wear pastel-colored shirts in France, and on one occasion, a young composer who came for advice was surprised to find him dressed in a white sweater, white pants, white stockings, and white shoes. The American pianist Beveridge Webster, who met the composer in the 1920s, recalled "a tiny man with an enormous head, a huge nose and an enormous intellect."

Ravel's personal habits have frequently been described by those who knew him. Although a confirmed hermit when composing, he enjoyed Parisian nightlife, the conversations, the lights, the jazz, and the crowds. A heavy smoker of cigarettes, Ravel also enjoyed sharp condiments, exotic dishes, cocktails, and fine wines. He excelled in swimming and was an

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indefatigable walker. Even during his terminal illness, there was a youthful agility in his step. Ravel's meticulous grooming was counterbalanced by a curious disorder in his personal affairs. He was somewhat absentminded and often lost track of time, particularly in antique shops, when buying gifts, or when examining rare editions for his library. When Léon Leyritz was finishing his bust of the composer, he wanted to verify some details. "I'll come tomorrow between 10 P.M. and 3 A.M.," was the sensible reply.

In the postwar years, when plagued by some creative impasses, his solution was to travel. If the new location proved to be helpful, he stayed; if not, he left. This strong sense of independence, both as an artist and as an individual, lies at the heart of Ravel's personality. "I love to work freely and without prejudice," he told a Danish journalist. "I have always done that. Therefore I do not belong to any school, or to any particular party. I have always been free." And in a letter to Florent Schmitt, written in 1921, he referred to his refusal to accept the Legion of Honor, which had created an uproar: "My logic? There's nothing surprising about it: it's to do only what I want according to what appeals to me. People tell you off, but who gives a damn, right?"

Although born of Catholic parents and baptized as an infant, Ravel was not a practicing Catholic and did not accept the last rites of the Church. He apparently was an agnostic, relying upon his inner conscience and moral sensitivity. Ravel never married, and this has given rise to much speculation. No love letters have come to light, probably because they were never written. Although not insensitive to feminine charm and beauty, it is clear that the dominant woman in his life was his mother, and, in a rare comment about marriage, he wrote in January 1919 to Madame Alfredo Casella: "Morality . . . this is what I practice, and what I am determined to continue. Artists are not made for marriage. We are rarely normal, and our lives are even less so." And to his disciple Manuel Rosenthal he explained as follows:

> You see, an artist must be very careful when he wishes to marry someone, because an artist never knows to what extent he may render his companion unhappy. He is obsessed by his creative work and by the problems which it poses. He lives a little like an awakened dreamer, and that's not amusing for a woman who lives with him. One must always consider that when one wishes to marry.

Like any other human being, Ravel had his moods and quirks. He was very sensitive about his short height and his limited abilities as a pianist and conductor. If he had a compliment to pay, it was often communicated to a third party. Thus, when soprano Marcelle Gerar went to Le Belvédère for an audition, she was received properly but coolly. Only later, through a mutual friend, did she learn that Ravel was impressed with her ability, and soon after she was asked to concertize with the composer. Criticism, on the other hand, was usually given directly to the person involved. "Your ballet is very bad," he told a young composer; and then with a gentle smile, "I tell you this because I know you can do much better."

A revealing, paradoxical touch is found in Le Belvédère, where the panels in the living room and bedroom were designed and painted by the master of the house. In the privacy of his bedroom, Ravel drew a series of columns—all of them upside down! This paradoxical aspect has been noted in both of his operas: in *L'Heure espagnole*, the characters almost become automatons, but the automatons chime with the tender warmth of life; in *L'Enfant et les sortilèges*, the child is cruel, but the animals are humane. As a young man, Ravel was attracted to paradoxes of all sorts, and in later years he enjoyed exploring the paradoxical aspect of art with colleagues. Although he stated that art was "false" and "a marvelous imposture," this notion must be seen in its proper perspective—namely, that he believed art to be a quest for beauty, rather than truth, an idea he derived from the writings of Edgar Allan Poe.

No doubt Ravel would have wished to compose more, particularly during the postwar years, but he endured extended periods of silence rather than compromise his ideals. If the "meaning of life" may be interpreted as how one spends one's time between two eternities, then its ultimate meaning for Maurice Ravel was to create music that was as perfect, as polished, and as beautiful as he could make it. This was his passion—indeed, his obsession.

Ravel's views of the nature and meaning of art were primarily based upon his formative studies at the Conservatoire, his reading of

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Baudelaire and Poe, and, of course, his personal amalgam of these and other elements. He stated that his objective as a composer was to seek "technical perfection. I can strive unceasingly to this end, since I am certain of never being able to attain it. The important thing is to get nearer to it all the time." How was one to approach the objective of technical perfection? According to Ravel, one submitted to a thorough and rigorous academic training by analyzing scores and studying the traditional precepts of harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration. Along with his colleagues at the Conservatoire, he wrote four-part fugues in open score, using the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass clefs. Ravel believed this kind of training to be crucial, for it developed the technical skills that were needed to solve compositional problems. The initial sketches of *Morgiane*, which were the very last notes to come from his pen, consisted of nothing more than a melody and figured bass—the identical procedure that he had used as a student in order to analyze compositions.

In later years, Ravel gave the following advice to young composers: "If you have nothing to say, you cannot do better, until you decide to give up composing for good, than say again what has already been well said. If you have something to say, that something will never emerge more distinctly than when you are being unwittingly unfaithful to your model." Ravel was convinced that composers should learn their craft like painters—by imitating good models. Yet, as Jean Cocteau pointed out in *Le Coq et l'arlequin*, "an original artist *cannot* copy. Thus, he has only to copy in order to be original." This observation is particularly apt with regard to Ravel's music, in which there is often a model that is ultimately eclipsed.

In explaining what he looked for in a composition, Ravel stressed the importance of "musical sensitivity," and that "a composer must have something to say." The critic Michel D. Calvocoressi pointed out that Ravel was particularly attracted to

> points of originality in idiom and texture. When calling attention to some beautiful thing, he would often wind up with: "Et puis, vous savez, on n'avait jamais fait ça!" [And then, you know, that hasn't been done before!] Questions of form seemed to preoccupy him far less. The one and only test of good form, he used to say, is continuity of interest. I do not remember his ever praising a work on account of its form. But, on the other hand, he was very sensitive to what he considered to be defective form.

Besides the axioms of imitation as the gateway to mastering one's craft and the objective of technical perfection, Ravel was convinced that a work of art is the product of a composer's individual consciousness, which is inextricably bound to his national heritage: "The manifestation of these two types of consciousness in music may break or satisfy all the academic rules, but such circumstance is of insignificant importance compared with the real aim, namely, fullness and sincerity of expression." It is apparent that Ravel's "fullness and sincerity of expression" are solidly within French tradition. Calvocoressi noted that his preference for writing shorter compositions was owing to a "deliberate, carefully thought-out aesthetic choice," and this terseness of logic is characteristic of French art. One also observes emotional reserve rather than expansiveness, elegance and preciosity, humor and tenderness, all of which is underpinned by a marked sensuousness. There is also a less common but distinct thread of drama extending from *Un Grand Sommeil noir*, *Si morne!*, and *Gaspard de la nuit*, through *La Valse*, the *Chansons madécasses*, and the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand.

The Ravelian melody, be it vocal or instrumental, shows little of the wandering chromaticism of Franck or Fauré's favored enharmonic ambiguities. It is diatonic, often mixing modality with tonality, and it generally proceeds by repetition, sequence, and variation rather than by genuine development. When writing "Spanish" music, he often used the Phrygian mode (e-f-g-a-b-c-d, *Rapsodie espagnole*). Likewise, pentatonic episodes appear (*Ma Mère l'Oye*), as well as the gapped scales of the East (for example, d-f-g-a-b-c, *Daphnis et Chloé*). The melodic phrase is generally brief and unornamented, frequently outlining the interval of the seventh, which is important both melodically and harmonically.

Ravel's harmonic language was considered audacious in its time. Without abandoning tonality, he extended its range, particularly by exploiting the chord of the major seventh (*Jeux d'eau*), chords with unresolved appoggiaturas (*Valses nobles et sentimentales*), and those

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with multiple appoggiaturas over pedal points ("Le Gibet" in *Gaspard de la nuit*). Bitonality (Sonata for Violin and Cello) and even touches of atonality (*Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*) are also found. As Ravel's art unfolded, a gradual but perceptible chastening occurred in his harmonic language. With few exceptions, the earlier period is richer harmonically (culminating in *Daphnis et Chloé*), followed by a more austere harmonic style beginning with *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and continuing through the *Chansons madécasses*. The pre-war compositions tend to favor homophonic writing, whereas some of the postwar works emphasize linear motion (Sonata for Violin and Piano).

Ravel's art is essentially that of a miniaturist. His operas, each less than an hour, consist of brief, contiguous scenes, and the ballet *Daphnis et Chloé* is unified by a small number of recurring motives. Melodic repetition is used to unify song cycles (*Chansons madécasses*) or multimovement compositions (*Rapsodie espagnole*).

In contrast to his treatment of form, which was generally conservative, Ravel's extensions of instrumental virtuosity were bold. *Gaspard de la nuit* builds upon Liszt's dazzling keyboard technique, and *Tzigane* is a spiritual descendant of Paganini. Ravel's orchestral technique was largely indebted to Rimsky-Korsakov and Richard Strauss. The former's *Capriccio espagnol* (1887) clearly influenced the *Rapsodie espagnole*, and the latter's tone poems (particularly *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*, 1895) were continually studied. During his student days, Ravel dutifully copied out the "safe" and "dangerous" ranges for each instrument as given in Widor's *Technique de l'orchestre moderne*. He enjoyed seeking out the most "dangerous" possibilities of each instrument as well as novel combinations of timbre. When orchestrating, he felt the need to isolate the notes of each family of instruments at the piano and observe, for example, what the woodwinds were doing at a particular moment. Upon analyzing his complex orchestral scores in this way, one will detect an underlying clarity in the part writing.

The piano is the privileged instrument in Ravel's art, not only because he was a pianist and composed at the keyboard, but because virtually all of the fresh trends in his style first appear in the piano music. The sophisticated harmonies and the music of Spain ("Habanera"), the dance rhythms and archaic pastiche (*Menuet antique*), the impressionistic techniques (*Jeux d'eau*), the thinner texture of the postwar years (*Le Tombeau de Couperin*), and even some of its harsher outlines (*Valses nobles et sentimentales*), together with the initial adaptation of jazz (*L'Enfant et les sortilèges*), are all announced at the keyboard. The piano music derives largely from the clarity and elegance of Domenico Scarlatti, François Couperin and the French *clavecinistes*, Mozart, Chabrier, and Saint-Saëns as well as the color and virtuosity of Chopin and particularly of Liszt.

An important aspect of Ravel's artistic creed was his predilection for remodeling his music. It appears that once a composition was perfected, the attempt was made to draw out all of its inherent possibilities. Almost half of his works were reshaped in one manner or another: a considerable number of piano pieces and vocal accompaniments were orchestrated, and several keyboard works were transcribed and then mounted as ballets. The diversity of Ravel's instrumental music is matched by the striking variety of his vocal works. From the preciosity of Pierre de Ronsard to the complex symbolism of Mallarmé, from the exoticism of Evariste de Parny to Colette's sensitive portrayal of childhood, Ravel rarely repeated himself, setting alexandrines and poems in prose from the Renaissance through the twentieth century. Most often, he turned to free verse and poems in prose. Unlike the more adventurous instrumental style, the vocal writing indicates traditional tessitura with relatively little interest in virtuosity. Behind this diversity lies the composer's desire for textual clarity, correct prosody, and his individualistic and sophisticated literary taste.

Posterity has seen fit to link the names of Debussy and Ravel, and a comparison of their achievements may perhaps best highlight Ravel's individual aesthetic path. Both composers were pianists who were trained at the Conservatoire, and whose national inheritance encompassed a millennium of music. Their approbation of Mozart, Chopin, Chabrier, and Mussorgsky, and their reservations with regard to Beethoven, Wagner, and d'Indy, were rather similar. They shared common friendships with Satie, Falla, and Stravinsky, and were strongly attracted to Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Poe.

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Despite their common heritage and many points of contact, Ravel claimed that he had followed a direction "opposite to that of Debussy's symbolism," and, influenced by Poe, had decided "to abandon the vagueness and formlessness of the early French impressionists in favor of a return to classic standards." From our vantage point, it is evident that each composer influenced the other to some extent, keeping in mind that once an artist achieves his own personality, external influences are of secondary importance. If *Shéhérazade* and the *Miroirs* indicate the spirit of Debussy, Debussy's *Estampes* bespeak the achievements of Ravel. It is possible that the clearer outlines and structures found in Debussy's late works came about through Ravel's influence, and Debussy's call for a thinner, less congested art was taken up by Ravel, *Les Six*, and much of the postwar generation. Ernest Ansermet has recalled a meeting with Debussy in which the composer gave him a score of the *Nocturnes* covered with corrections of all sorts. When the conductor asked which ones were valid, Debussy replied, "I am no longer sure. They are all possibilities. Take this score and use those which seem good to you." One could scarcely imagine Ravel making such a statement. For him, there was but one final product—the one which was as perfect as he could make it. In the last analysis, the creative personalities of Debussy and Ravel were widely divergent. Debussy's productivity was effusive, uninhibited, and opened up fresh paths, whereas Ravel's small output, emotional reticence, and innovation within tradition were coupled with an unrivaled technical mastery of his craft.

No discussion of Ravel's art would be complete without commenting on the decisive importance of Edgar Allan Poe's writings. Poe's marked influence upon modern French literature has frequently been observed. Baudelaire and Mallarmé, among others, translated his works, which proved to be a revelation for Ravel. In Poe's essay *The Poetic Principle* one finds the closest approximation to Ravel's aesthetic.

> *That* pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, *of the soul*, which we recognize as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the Heart.

Ravel's art strove neither for passion nor for truth, but rather for "the contemplation of the Beautiful," through the satisfaction of the mind, by means of the ear's pleasure. Thus, a final paradox was perfectly stated by Keats, who already knew that by creating his own beauty, Ravel would thereby create his own truth. With his striving for clarity, balance, and good taste, the composer of *Daphnis et Chloé* created an art that embodies the timeless values of the French nation.

A survey of Ravel's art indicates a small body of music written over a creative period of four decades, from the early 1890s to the early 1930s. There are approximately sixty compositions, of which slightly more than half are instrumental: fifteen pieces and suites for the piano, eight chamber works, six orchestral works, several ballets, and two piano concerti. The vocal music consists of eighteen songs and song cycles with accompaniment for piano, chamber ensemble, or orchestra, several settings of folk melodies, one work for unaccompanied mixed chorus, and two operas. It would be misleading to divide this music into periods of apprenticeship and maturity, for Ravel's earliest compositions were on the whole remarkably characteristic. The "Habanera" and the *Menuet antique* were written by a twenty-year-old student, and with the completion of *Jeux d'eau* at the age of twenty-six, the composer's style was firmly set. From the outset, Ravel's approach to composition could be called metamorphic—that is, in each new undertaking he would cover fresh ground, placing his personal stamp upon widely differing techniques and idioms. Ravel's observation that as a child he was sensitive "to every kind of music" offers an important clue to the striking diversity found in his art. He explained this innovative approach to musical style to a French journalist as follows:

> The true personality for a composer . . . is not to seek to have one which is immediately recognizable and stylized in unchanging formulas. That is the weak side of Richard Strauss, who is other-

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wise a musician of genius, whereas the example of a Stravinsky, constantly seeking to renew himself and ceaselessly exploring extremely varied domains, seems infinitely preferable to me.

As a creative artist, Ravel was keenly aware of his strengths and weaknesses. "It is true," he told Manuel Rosenthal, "that I possess genius. But what does that mean? If everyone knew how to work like I do, then everyone would write music which exhibits as much genius as mine. But everyone does not know how to work like I do, and therein lies the essence of genius—knowing how to work intelligently, and how to organize one's ideas." A different view was expressed in a concert critique: "The principle of *genius*, that is of artistic creation, can be established only by instinct, or sensibility." This problematic duality of craftsmanship and inspiration was perceptively summed up by Ravel when he observed that he knew exactly how he composed the *Bolero*, but did not know how he composed *Daphnis et Chloé*. If the childlike side of his personality demanded that a visitor see no pencil, eraser, or music paper on his piano, the fact is that the smallest creative act required an immense amount of labor, and this largely accounts for his small oeuvre as well as his many incomplete projects. For many years he attempted to write a symphony, but finally he gave it up. He never turned to the theme and variations, and he composed for neither the organ nor the church.

A complete accounting of the elements in Ravel's art would run the gamut from Gregorian chant to Gershwin, passing through the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras. He managed to keep his personal touch in a style that varied from the classical simplicity of *Ma Mère l'Oye* to the transcendental romantic virtuosity of *Gaspard de la nuit*, from the luxuriant, caressing sonority of *Daphnis et Chloé* to the austere violence of the *Chansons madécasses*, and from Renaissance pastiche to adaptations of jazz. His achievement is not eclectic and it cannot be summed up in one all-encompassing label. It is thoroughly French in orientation and is solidly based upon traditional practice. Like any other significant artist, Ravel fashioned his own laws and created his own universe: his Swiss-Basque heritage and Parisian sophistication, his subtle humor, his fascination with travel and exoticism, his interest in animals and children, and his keen observations of nature are mirrored in his art, as are the disorientation and tragedy of World War I. Behind all of these multifarious threads lies the composer's sovereign conscience, and, in the words of the poet Tristan Klingsor, "the ironic and tender heart which beats under the velvet vest of Maurice Ravel."

In 1975, the centenary celebrations of Ravel's birth included many special concerts, recordings, and exhibitions on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1985, the first issue of a new journal, *Cahiers Maurice Ravel*, provided further evidence that Ravel has entered the pantheon of twentieth-century composers. At this writing, his art continues to enjoy extraordinary popularity with the public as well as the respect and admiration of musicians and scholars. In the brief necrology that appeared in *Modern Music* (January-February 1938), a young American composer, Elliott Carter, perceptively summarized Ravel's unique position in the annals of twentieth-century music:

> Maurice Ravel was an exponent of that careful, precise workmanship, elegance, and grace he so admired in the music of Mozart, of whom he was not an unworthy descendant. The type seems to grow rarer as this troubled century progresses. His work, however, was a monument to the dignity and precision that even now all worthy musicians should strive for and that French music has at its best always captured. Combined with an extraordinary sense of style and infallible ear was a refinement of taste and a unique inspiration that made every work he wrote right and final in its own category. All his life he shunned cheapness and facility, yet his style and manner of orchestration have already left their mark on all music, from the simplest jazz to the most elaborate works of Stravinsky. His music will always be a great glory to the art he practiced so long and so well.

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Here Under False Pretenses

The Marx Brothers Crash the Gates

DANIEL LIEBERFELD and JUDITH SANDERS

Think "Marx Brothers" and a composite of oddly dressed pranksters comes to mind, complete with greasepaint mustache, curly blond wig, and phony Italian accent. First associations, though, don't usually include the Marx Brothers' Jewishness. Audiences are not invited to pay much attention to it since the Marx Brothers' films contain few overtly Jewish allusions. Critics also have not explored the links between the Marx Brothers' ethnicity and their comedies of (bad) manners. Their Jewish immigrant heritage is worth highlighting, however, because it animates their unique and complex comic vision.

The children of German-Jewish immigrants, the Marx Brothers grew up in a lower-middle-class immigrant neighborhood on Manhattan's East Side. Yet their seven classic films are set in the world of America's Anglo-Protestant upper class, including a resort hotel (*The Cocoanuts*, 1929); a Long Island mansion (*Animal Crackers*, 1930); a luxury liner (*Monkey Business*, 1931); a private college (*Horse Feathers*, 1932); high government office (*Duck Soup*, 1933); the opera (*A Night at the Opera*, 1935); and a private sanitarium (*A Day at the Races*, 1937).

In each comedy the Marx Brothers play ethnic outsiders trespassing in the preserves of Gentile elites. They are gauche, lower-class gatecrashers who don't know the rules of polite society and, furthermore, don't care. They are rootless scavengers who lack families, jobs, and a permanent address. Their apparent reason for being is to mock, cheat, and insult the cultured well-to-do.

In each film the Marx Brothers infiltrate elite realms under false pretenses. Groucho's Captain Spaulding, the celebrated African explorer in *Animal Crackers*, has clearly never set foot in Africa. Nor has his Doctor Hackenbush ("high blood pressure on the right side and low blood pressure on the left") ever been near a medical school. But once within the gates of privilege, these flagrant frauds neither tiptoe nor toady. Instead they break up the banquet, pilfer the silver, undo the opera, and hijack the horse race. Meanwhile, in a saccharine subplot, a young couple launches a family or career and gains bona fide social acceptance, as the three Marx Brothers' characters never will.

With these consistent plot elements, the Marx Brothers enact comic parables about Jewish immigrant experience in America. Their comedy incorporates the physical and psychological trajectory of immigration: the voyage over, fears of exclusion, pressures for assimilation, and the hopes placed on the next generation. In particular, the pervasive themes of trespass and belonging, of pretense and legitimacy reflect immigrant anxieties about acceptance into American society and ambivalence toward the costs and rewards of assimilation.

As native-born Americans, the Marx Brothers had enough perspective on immigrant experiences to reinterpret them humorously. But as the children of immigrants, they continually felt assimilationist pressures intrude in their own lives. From their earliest years, their mother, Minnie Marx, tried to disguise

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her family's ethnicity. She gave her sons names associated with British aristocracy—Leonard, Arthur, Julius, Herbert, and Milton—names so overused by parents of her generation that they became identified with Jews. She also bleached her sons' dark, curly hair. For her work as a theatrical agent, she took the goyish pseudonym "Minnie Palmer."

Insecurities shared by many Jewish immigrants inspired many such attempts at ethnic disguise. Fleeing both poverty and ethnic violence, most European Jews had come to America as refugees. Although about one-third of all immigrants between 1908 and 1937 returned to Europe, only about 5 percent of Jews did so. With no national homeland to which they could reliably return, Jewish-Americans were strongly attracted to the "melting pot" ideal of assimilation. But while far more secure than they had been in Europe, Jews in America still had cause to worry about their newfound refuge. Congress restricted Jewish immigration in the 1920s. That decade and the next—the Marx Brothers' most prolific—were the most blatantly anti-Semitic in American history.

Industrial-strength bigots such as Henry Ford, radio priest Charles Coughlin, and the Ku Klux Klan fulminated against Jews and the threats they purportedly posed. More insidious were systems of exclusion in housing, employment, and education that barred Jews from mainstream routes to security and influence. According to historian Carey McWilliams, many Jewish-Americans adapted by turning to new, high-risk enterprises such as the entertainment business, which lay outside the bounds of social respectability.

It was in this context of social and economic marginalization that, in Neal Gabler's phrase, "the Jews invented Hollywood." Hollywood in its early years was a largely Jewish enclave. The founders of Paramount, MGM, Warner Brothers, Columbia, and other major film studios were, like the Marxes, Jewish immigrants. They were attuned, Gabler notes, to "the dreams and aspirations of other immigrants and working-class families, two overlapping groups that made up a significant portion of the early moviegoing audience." Because of their fierce cravings for assimilation, and because they were prominent targets for American anti-Semites, studio executives tried to dissociate themselves from their Jewishness. Films about Jews were considered taboo. Their productions instead interpreted Anglo-Protestant America with an idealism and simplicity that perhaps only outsiders could provide.

Fortunately, the Marx Brothers managed to escape the producers' assimilationist strictures. They arrived in Hollywood in the late 1920s with their comic vision already formed and their commercial potential proven onstage. Because the Jewish content of their work was mainly covert, they could obey the letter of Hollywood's unwritten law while trashing its spirit.

The Marx Brothers' uniqueness lies in their unorthodox treatment of immigrant insecurities over acceptance and assimilation. Instead of trying to "pass," they exaggerate their ethnicity. Instead of repressing the immigrant's shadowy fear of exposure and censure, they turn a glaring spotlight on it.

The Marx Brothers' enactment of Jewish-immigrant insecurity, although mainly coded, sometimes sticks out like Groucho's cigar. In *Monkey Business*, for example, they are stowaways on an ocean liner bound for America. They hide below decks in barrels ostentatiously labeled "kippered herring," a self-mocking symbol of the immigrant Jew. Rather than keeping to their place, they send the captain insulting notes and invade his quarters. When the boat docks in New York, they collectively impersonate Maurice Chevalier, a more acceptable foreigner. When the absurd, transparent disguise fails, Groucho gaily informs an official, "We're just trying to sneak off the boat!"

In *A Night at the Opera*, they again play stowaways bound for America. This time they don enormous beards—exaggerations of those worn by Old-World Jews—and impersonate a trio of Russian aviators. A suspicious official declares, "These men are in the country under false pretenses!" The Marx Brothers are thrown in jail in what amounts to a comic exaggeration of the immigrant's nightmare of rejection and exclusion.

By playing bearded stowaways who reek of herring, the Marx Brothers seem to have internalized nativist stereotypes of immigrants, particularly European Jews. But they simultaneously defang anti-immigrant, nativist attitudes by parodying them. In *Monkey Business*, Groucho snidely informs an Indian chief, "If you don't like our country, you can go back

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where you came from." Earlier in the film, after a horrendous pun by Chico, Groucho turns to face the camera and declares, "There's my argument—restrict immigration!"—this at a time when the patrician Immigration Restriction League had warned against the corrupting influence of physically, morally, and politically "degenerate" Jews.

Yet some of their films stereotype other ethnic groups without ironic distance. As fugitives in *A Day at the Races*, they hide out in the black part of town. Poverty and social marginality, as well as music, seem to ally them with a similarly outcaste group. But the mass of dancing, grinning darkies is voiceless and reified, while the Marx Brothers are endearingly personalized.

The Marx Brothers concocted their comic personalities on the stages of immigrant neighborhoods in New York and Philadelphia. From the outset they adopted explicitly ethnic roles, in part because of the large immigrant audiences for ethnically based material. In 1910 when the Marx family moved to Chicago to be closer to the small-time vaudeville circuits they were working, immigrants and their children made up roughly 80 percent of the city's population.

Most of these immigrant families were struggling to learn English and take advantage of expanded public education. Not coincidentally, classroom comedy became a favorite Marx Brothers theme. In 1910 they staged *Fun in Hi Skule*, with Groucho as a wisecracking German schoolteacher; Harpo, in a curly red wig, as an Irish troublemaker and clown; and Chico as an education-proof Italian. Groucho's character became Yiddish as hostility toward Germany grew around World War I. These stereotyped characters—a European Jew (Groucho), an Irishman (Harpo), and an Italian (Chico)—were broadly representative of the major immigrant groups at the time and were essentially the same characters the Marx Brothers would later play in their films. Their characters' ethnic diversity broadened the Marx Brothers' appeal beyond that of traditional Jewish acts and may also have provided some cover against anti-Semitism.

The Marx Brothers spent twelve years of what Harpo termed "unmitigated hell" touring the South and Midwest, where offstage they often encountered anti-Semitic bigotry. They finally arrived on Broadway in 1924 with a hugely successful revue called *I'll Say She Is!* The proceeds enabled Groucho to move to Long Island, where he hobnobbed at the poshest mansions and grew queasy on the swankest yachts. He paid five thousand dollars to join an exclusive country club, but reported that his first tee-off smashed the window of the club president's car, while the second streaked into the clubhouse, nearly braining the club president himself. Although this story is probably apocryphal, it conveys the insecurities that distracted a son of relatively poor immigrants on the playgrounds of the social elite.

The malaise Groucho felt at decamping from his Jewish neighborhood in Manhattan to a Great Neck estate pervades *Animal Crackers*, the Broadway show that became the Marx Brothers' second film. In it, they invade a weekend party at the Long Island mansion of Mrs. Rittenhouse (played by Margaret Dumont). This is just the sort of social event to which most immigrants could only dream of being invited. In this fantasy, Groucho is the guest of honor. As the heroic Captain Spaulding, he is accepted by the Gentile elite. But despite the other guests' acclaim, the "explorer" feels out of place. He frets, "Did someone call me '*schnorrer*'?" No sooner has he arrived than he sings, "I must be going." Groucho's ambivalence toward Mrs. Rittenhouse's world reflects the tensions immigrants felt between ethnic pretense in the service of assimilation and assertion of ethnic identity at the risk of not being invited to the party.

The Marx Brothers occasionally acknowledge this tension by dropping their disguise. In *Animal Crackers* Chico and Groucho sit by themselves at Mrs. Rittenhouse's party. Chico says, "I'm a stranger here myself." Groucho replies, "What do you think I am? One of the early settlers?"

When Chico and Harpo enter as hired musicians, Chico's crudeness is obvious from his first words: "How are you. Where's the dining room?" The butler removes Harpo's cape, revealing him in his *gatkes*. Mrs. Rittenhouse's guests panic and scatter. Through their outrageousness, the Marx Brothers seem to reject the melting-pot strategy of seamless assimilation, and, instead, they model an almost militant ethnic assertiveness. In the process, they gleefully embrace crude, even repellent, stereotypes.

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There is something embarrassing about Groucho as soon as one thinks of him as a Jew, instead of just a brilliant wise guy of no particular ethnicity. He is a scrawny, smart-mouthed cheapskate—an anti-Semite's caricature of a Jew. Although his Jewishness is never stated outright, his appearance and demeanor broadcast it unambiguously. His trademark mustache and eyebrows exaggerate Jews' supposed hairiness. The only character with glasses, Groucho simultaneously reinforces the stereotype of the effeminate Jewish male. He underscores his unmasculine appearance with lines like "Afraid? A man who's licked his weight in wild caterpillars? You bet I'm afraid!" When taunted with the rhetorical question, "Are you a man or a mouse?" he responds, "You put a piece of cheese down here and you'll find out." In his absurd courtship of the ample dowager played by Margaret Dumont, he becomes what the historian David Biale has termed a "sexual *schlemiel*" (and a prototype for Woody Allen).

Groucho also flaunts the prime anti-Semitic stereotype of economic predatoriness. There can be few greater skinflints in the movies. As a singer's manager in *A Night at the Opera*, for example, he calculates how much of the star's thousand-dollar-per-night salary he will actually pay:

Chico: How much you pay him?
Groucho: [Aside] Let's see—a thousand dollars a night. I'm entitled to a small profit. . . .
[To Chico] How about ten dollars a night?
Chico: Ten dollars! We take it.
Groucho: All right, but remember, I get ten percent for negotiating the deal.

Moreover, Groucho is a Pushy Jew. "I have an appointment to insult Ambassador Trentino," he announces, as if it were all in a day's work. Not content merely to crash Mrs. Teasdale's garden party, he goes out of his way to dunk his doughnut in a legitimate guest's coffee. His persistent rudeness ("With this insurance policy, you're well provided for in your old age, which will be here in a couple of weeks now if I'm any judge of horseflesh") spurs his victims to satisfying exclamations of dismay, such as, "Of all the colossal impudence!" and "I've never been so insulted in all my life!" (Groucho: "Well, it's early yet.")

While Groucho carries anti-Semitic stereotypes to comic extremes, his brothers keep pace with negative stereotypes of other immigrant groups. Chico the Italian is a shiftless petty criminal with a childlike love of food and music. His feigned stupidity and mangled English stymie anyone who tries to order him around. Brother Harpo's character shed much of its stage Irishness, but his crumpled hat and coat peg him immediately as a bum. Completely lacking in social grace, incapable of speech, and more at ease among animals, Harpo is a sub-human leprechaun and skirt chaser, polite society's worst nightmare.

Remarkably, the Marx Brothers succeed in converting their characters' seediness into strength. While their crude ethnic caricatures are playful and vital, members of the establishment appear as dull as prize sheep. As musicians and exotic raconteurs, the ethnic outsiders leaven the stodgy world of the rich and bored. In *Duck Soup*, for example, Gloria Teasdale (Dumont), whose money and influence run Freedonia, insists that Rufus T. Firefly (Groucho) is the one man who can save the fictional nation.

Freedonia, according to its anthem, is the "land of the brave and free"—an obvious play on "the land of the free and the home of the brave." But Freedonia is no golden America of greenhorn dreams, with equal opportunity for all. Rather, it is an enclave of pseudo-European aristocrats, where ethnics like the Marx Brothers will be forever on the margins.

The Marx Brothers' portrayal of American elites reflects idealization of the sort common to groups on the social periphery. As Isaiah Berlin observes, Jews, like other minorities who are heavily discriminated against, desperately sought to be integrated with "the enviable part of humanity." Minorities who are excluded from the central life of the community, Berlin notes, tend to develop either exaggerated resentment of or admiration for the dominant majority. Marx Brothers' comedy displays a similar mixture of idealization and contempt for social elites. Their grubby immigrant characters look like they sleep on park benches. And yet they are talented, unpretentious, and altogether more likable than the snobs who humiliate them and on whom they, in turn, are revenged.

Ambivalence toward elite society was likely reinforced in the Marx Brothers' case by their own transformation from social zilches to celebrities who moved in the sophisticated social

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circles of New York and Hollywood. Harpo (whose résumé included a stint as a piano player in a Long Island brothel) became the darling of the self-styled Algonquin wits, Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley, George S. Kaufman, and the rest, whose humor was more rarefied than vulgar.

Duck Soup is fraught with ambivalence toward social status. As Freedonia's President, Groucho is absurd. He looks and acts all wrong. Besides, no real leader would have a name like Rufus T. Firefly. The film's plot actually turns on this name and its low-status connotations. The haughty Trentino from neighboring Sylvania insults Firefly by calling him an "upstart." While Firefly has ignored Trentino's previous insults, he cannot tolerate this one. He retorts, "The man doesn't live who can call a Firefly an upstart. Why, *The Mayflower* was full of Fireflys, and a few horseflies, too!" It is this insult to Groucho's origins that sends the two countries to war in the film. It takes a lot of fuss to drown out the truth: Groucho really *is* an upstart. He is ultra-immigrant, a Jew through and through, and will never pass for anything else. Groucho's celebrated remark, "I wouldn't want to join any club that would have me for a member," should also be interpreted in this context of ambivalence toward assimilation and social acceptance. (When Groucho was refused membership in a Beverly Hills swimming club because he was Jewish, he reportedly asked whether his daughter, who was only half Jewish, could go in up to her waist.)

The quintessential representative of the upper classes is, of course, the character almost always played by Margaret Dumont. Dripping with pearls and intoning queenly banalities, she is a poor person's fantasy of a rich one. Her silk-swaddled girth advertises that she's never missed a meal and contrasts perfectly with Groucho's lean and wolfish look.

Slipped among the insults Groucho pitches at Dumont's straitlaced Gentile are proposals of marriage. Intermarriage was a subject of keen interest for Jews in America and a popular theme of Jewish-American literature. A pathway to social advancement, intermarriage was also a transgression that threatened the ethnic community. Groucho's ambivalent courtship of Dumont is a comic response to this problem. Through their ludicrous wooing of leisure-class shiksas, the Marx Brothers permit the release of communal tension over exogamy.

The tensions between pretense and legitimacy, between assimilation and separateness, propel *Animal Crackers*. The plot is about Roscoe Chandler's exhibition of a valuable painting by François Jacques Dubois Gilbert Beaugard—an artist whose main credential seems to consist in possessing almost every conceivable French name. The painting is a trite rendering of a horseman and his hounds. Its only possible appeal is its expensive whiff of European aristocracy. Harpo uses it as a blanket.

When a copy is substituted for the original, the bogus Beaugard fools all the socialites. The interchangeable canvases are a metaphor for the malleability of social status. Like his prize painting, Chandler himself turns out to be a pretentious fraud. Chico and Harpo expose him:

Chico: I've seen you someplace before. . . . Wait, wait. Somewhere I meet you before becausa you face is very familiar.
Chandler: Well, I am, after all, one of the most well-known men in America. The newspapers *will* keep running my photograph.
Chico: You're Abe Kabibl.
Chandler: Nonsense. Chandler is the name. Roscoe W. Chandler.
Chico: You're Abie the fish peddler from Czechoslovakia. Aha, there's the birthmark—Abie the fish peddler. A-bie the fish man! A-bie the fish man!
Chandler: All right, I confess! I *was* Abie the peddler.
Chico: Well, how did you get to be Roscoe W. Chandler?
Chandler: Say, how did *you* get to be Italian?
Chico: Never mind. Whose confession is this?

Despite his British pseudonym and phony French accent, Chandler is just an ordinary Kabibl from Czechoslovakia. He reeks of fish as pungently as the Marx Brothers. Chico spots the immigrant Jew by his telltale birthmark, the ugly stigma that Kabibl-turned-Chandler hides beneath his starched white shirt. But fantastically, this mark of (foreign) birth proves detachable. At the end of the scene, Harpo steals it. He and Chico happily claim the token of Chandler's discarded ethnicity, unaware that they have stolen something that nobody ought to want.

Few immigrants could afford to be as uninhibited in the real world. Although their film fantasies relieve them of the consequences, the Marx Brothers' outsider status consigns them permanently below decks. None of the younger characters in the films will aspire to

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be like them, although they may find them diverting. Groucho, Harpo, and Chico will watch from steerage as the next generation climbs to the upper decks on the ladder of assimilation.

This brings us to the sub-plot of the young couple. The young man is poor, but energetic and talented. Given a chance he will certainly succeed, but an older generation's conservatism blocks his progress and the pair's chances for marriage. In *A Night at the Opera*, Gottlieb, the pompous impresario, rebuffs a request that he give young Riccardo a role. Chandler likewise ignores the gifted young painter in *Animal Crackers*. But in the end, the young artist's copy fools the connoisseur; the youthful singer replaces the established star in the opera and brings down the house. In each case, the younger man's talents are recognized so that he and the young woman can marry.

The all-American couple represents the more assimilated younger generation on whom immigrant families pinned their fond hopes. Like first-generation parents, the Marx Brothers uphold and abet the young couple's triumphant assimilation, but they also stand apart from it.

By subverting ethnic images, by satirizing elite values and institutions, and by raising, comically and covertly, anxiety-provoking themes such as intermarriage, the Marx Brothers relieved ethnic audiences' tensions over assimilation. Under the protective guise of humor, they also enacted immigrants' collective resentment toward elites whose prejudices they found threatening. By parodying anti-immigrant stereotypes, the Marx Brothers drain them of their potency. And because they are acting out a fantasy, they get away with all of it.

The Marx Brothers' humor is playful and anti-sophisticated. It is attuned with a foreigner's ear to the quirks and puns of English and to the parody-prone elements of legalese and other official discourse. Their humor elevates low-brow immigrant culture in response to the snobbish refinement and elitism of those insiders and sophisticates who define their social position by exclusion. Ethnic and class perspectives overlap in their films, most of which were made during the Great Depression. Their films affirm the essential strategies of immigrant and lower-class cultures: mutual aid, entrepreneurship and hustle, and a wry accommodation to the exigencies of day-to-day survival.

The Marx Brothers' response to social pressures on Jewish and other immigrant Americans was liberating. There was relief in acting outrageously, in dramatizing secret fears of exclusion. They did on-screen what immigrants generally are not allowed: to mock publicly the values of the host country and indulge in stereotypes about one's own group.

Marx Brothers comedies are also fantasies of liberation from social constraint: the freedom to be aggressive and impolite, to call attention to one's body, and yet to garner social rewards. This fantasy is no doubt universally attractive, but it was especially so for Jews and other immigrants contending with the pressures of assimilation into an alien and often unwelcoming culture.

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MEMOIR

Album of Ages

Stanley Kauffmann

I

One of my troubles, through much of my life, has been that I was a bright boy. My brightness was clear before I began school. When I was four, my mother would read stories to me, and I was soon able to repeat them word for word, turning the pages at the right moment, so that visitors would think I was reading.

When I started school, in New York, in the early 1920s, no real system existed to accommodate precocious children. All that the schools could do was to skip them, as it was called. When I was in 2A, the first half of the second year, I was skipped to 2B before the term was out. When I was in 3A, I was skipped along to 3B, and so on. This happened so often in the eight years of grade school that I finished in five years.

My parents were proud. I was, too, and excited, although a bit embarrassed because some of my classmates, all of whom were boys, called me "teacher's pet." One point I didn't consider at first, and no adult mentioned it, either. Every time I was skipped, I was moved up into a group six months older than the group I had been in. Almost all in my graduating class were fourteen. I was eleven. This difference, in several ways, touched my whole life.

The first effects were obvious enough. As the skipping went on, since I was the youngest in a class, I was soon also among the smallest. This meant that when teams were being drawn up in the schoolyard or gangs were being organized, I was the last choice, grudgingly made. I tried to show my mettle. Fist fights frightened me, but I virtually invited one with a bigger boy in order to prove myself. My insides were iced with fear, but I plunged in, remembering some movie in which a man smaller than his opponent lost a fight but earned a place in a group because of his pluck. After some desperate swinging by me and some painful jabs by my foe, this happened for me, too.

When I graduated, I was spared a worse handicap in age. In those days New York had a high school for exceptional boys where they finished the regular four-year curriculum in three years. This school required an entrance exam. I was invited to take it, and I finished in the top sector. But my parents thought it over. By then they had seen my social dislocation, and they decided that the three-year difference between me and my schoolfellows was enough. By college it would have increased to four years. I had already been rubbed enough in age difference to agree with them. Fitting in had become at least as important as standing out. I went to an ordinary high school.

Adolescence arrived, and with it my full growth, which was nothing exceptional. In high school, three years younger than most and lighter, I tried out for track, but I wasn't fast enough. The junior varsity football team had a weight limit of 125 pounds, and I hung around there for a while before being cut from the squad. My sports career was channeled into cheerleading. In time I became the captain of the cheerleading squad. I led my school's cheers at our annual football game with our chief rival at the Polo Grounds on Thanksgiving Day, 1930.

Adolescence brought girls, too, of course. At least I wished it would bring them. Like my

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grade school, my high school was all boys. I heard the lunchroom lies of older boys about their weekend exploits with girls, and I believed them, less because they were credible than because I felt that believing them was part of growing up. One Saturday I met a classmate on the street walking with a girl, a real girl, with gleaming hair and curvy figure and high heels, a girl who actually existed. All I did was say hello and pass, but the encounter confirmed my feeling that I was on the brink of something wonderful and that, because my classmates were older, they had beat me to it.

I went to the Sunday School of a Reform temple because it was coed and I could meet girls. The girls, like everyone else in my class, were older than I. I didn't have the money to take them out, for movies or sodas or both, but in any case I wouldn't have impressed them much. All the sparkle that a boy needs to impress adolescent girls—size, sports prowess, special dancing skill, skill with a musical instrument—I didn't have. Poetry, and I was writing some poems, was no kind of attraction. These Sunday School girls didn't see my high school magazine, and anyway they wouldn't have cared.

I tried imagination. I imagined myself older than I looked, old for my age. Saddened by experience too painful to mention. I invented a family background for myself, undisprovable, of high-born European romance. Sometimes I was partly believed. Still, at parties girls usually treated me like the group's brainy baby. They patted my cheek before they went off into huddles with older boys.

In another way, too, I paid for my grade school precocity. I never learned how to study. In grade school I had gobbled up books, every kind. In high school, that wasn't enough. Subjects had to be really studied. I was good only at what I liked, what I could gobble, English, history, music. Other subjects, mathematics, chemistry, Latin, bored me, partly because I couldn't gobble them. I managed somehow to get through the boring subjects, but in those classes I was no longer the brightest boy.

My cousin Frances, eight years older, a real student, used to come to our house to tutor me in Latin, in which she had once excelled. I tried to pay attention, but I was spoiled. I didn't like to do things that didn't immediately interest me. I liked things at which I could shine, shining that would bring me praise. It took me years to learn how to read for information as well as for absorption. All because I had been bright so early.

II

In college the age difference became much less of a problem. By that time, though I was only fifteen when I began, I was full-grown and didn't look smaller than the people around me. Appellations helped, too. In grade school the teachers had called us by our first names, in high school by our last names. In college I was Mr. Kauffmann and felt intimations of maturity.

In college, for the first time except for Sunday School, I went to school with girls. The change helped and hindered what was left of my age problem. Merely being around them every day in the course of work gave me greater ease with them, especially ease in not paying attention to them. But when I wanted to interest one of them, the fact that I was younger than the girl made me reach again for compensations, attractions.

Once again I adopted tinges of melancholy. My summer experience helped. Every summer since I was nine until I went to college, I had worked on farms in upstate New York. Now I fantasized on that experience. I told tales to girls of my modest heroism, of seasoning by grimness. One evening I was having a late snack with an eighteen-year-old girl who knew my age. Cleverly, I thought, I maneuvered her into forcing out of me an account of a tragic love affair up in the country, all of which I spun out of some dates with a farm girl. My college friend listened rapt and swore to keep my secret, but the tale didn't help the way I hoped.

Another evening I went to the home of a girl who was a drama major like me. She was older than most of the others in our class and had something of a racy reputation. I was to help her prepare for an exam in theater history, at which I was a whiz. Her parents greeted me warmly and sent us into her room to work. After a couple of hours she said she was ready for the exam. She thanked me.

It was a spring night. She suggested that we go up on the roof for a breath of air. We went. No one else was there. I knew I was to be rewarded for my help, but she was so much older than I that I was a bit knotted and ner-

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vous. Oddly, I had never been bothered this way in the country with country girls. Nature, naturalness opened me up. But here, among city-wise people, with this supposedly shrewd girl, I felt junior again. She and I chatted for a few minutes. She waited. Not quite sure, I did nothing. Then she shrugged, patted my cheek, and led me downstairs. I tried to handle it as if I were too far advanced in amour to bother with a few kisses and gropes.

In my third and fourth years I was asked to coach freshman and sophomore acting students in roles they were learning. For this work I got some financial credit toward my tuition. At one point the acting teacher assigned sophomores the choruses in *Henry V*, and after many coaching sessions, "O, for a muse of fire" haunted my dreams. It even survived in after years as a tag of recognition between me and some of those students.

One of them was a girl I particularly liked. During my senior year, a friend of my family gave me tickets to the Metropolitan Opera, good seats. I invited this girl, and she accepted.

I wanted to impress her with my knowledge of opera-going more than of opera, I wanted to appear suave, I wanted to seem more than the nineteen I was. I borrowed my father's gold-headed cane, carried it on the subway out to Brooklyn where I called for her, carried it to the opera house, back to Brooklyn. She didn't smile. She never mentioned the cane. That girl went on to considerable renown, but, beneath any admiration I have felt for her through the years, I have always been grateful. Because she didn't laugh at me that evening in 1935 when I was trying to be suave.

III

After college, age, as a difference, faded. The grid of years against which I saw myself, and was seen, disappeared. I was no longer a freshman or a senior, expected to be a certain age. I was still younger than most of my friends and colleagues, but it was no longer a point of either discomfort or pride.

Laura reassured me. We married when I was twenty-six. She was somewhat younger, which we both enjoyed. Anyway, long before we married, she said, "This age stuff. What does it matter? Now you're in between. Older than I am, younger than a lot of people we know. What does it matter either way? Now?"

I agreed. Now, if I thought of age at all, it was otherwise. Praise for finishing college at nineteen had been like a pair of itchy trousers. Praise for whatever I did in the world, if I got it, was a private pleasure. Others didn't know I was younger. No one ever mentioned the word prodigy. My early start became my secret buffer zone. I made mistakes in my life after college, in one job or another, one ambition or another. Compared to older friends, I had time to spare.

Through the decades, the parade of decades, age comparisons became even dimmer for me. Between nineteen and twenty-two the chasm is wide, not between thirty-nine and forty-two.

Then, when I passed fifty, something phenomenal happened. Age consciousness returned, but differently. After being the youngest in most groups years before, I was now usually the oldest. In 1967 I began teaching, in universities. Among students I was of course by far the oldest. As time slid by, some of the students each year became friends, remained friends. Beyond their qualities, I suspected secretly that I enjoyed having them as friends because they helped to balance things out. For so long, I had been the youngest.

This suspicion opened my eyes further. Aware once again of relative age, I began to see that, even among people other than students, I was usually the oldest. We had a few friends left from our earliest married days. Other than those few, almost everyone around me was—suddenly, it seemed—younger than I.

I'm old now. It feels lovely. The familiar questions bubble up into the brain. Where did the years go? How can I be old and still feel young inside? Now that those questions are mine, questions that have bothered billions before me, I feel that I have joined a gigantic society of predecessors.

It feels lovely. Laura and I have had the luck so far to escape serious ailment, though every day stretches that luck thinner. Still, while it continues, there is relishing to be done. Not least of little things. The way people hold doors for me, offer me seats in buses. The assurance that, if needful, I can square up to big men without tremor. The assumption by some that I'm wise, when I'm no wiser than I've

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been for a long time. I like being coddled by younger people as if I were a fragile dotard, though I'm not yet one or the other. I like the license to be grumpy with sullen clerks and sniffy headwaiters. I like refraining from too many stories about the Old Days, mostly the Depression days, and priding myself on my restraint.

Larger matters, too. I like seeing babies I have dandled become parents. I like the glow of living with Laura. She and I know so much about each other. Often, when people mention something that has happened to them, she and I don't even exchange glances as we remember when it happened to us.

High among the pleasures, possibly too high, is negative satisfaction. I've discarded most of my fretting about myself, most of the goals and goads. Like Anna Livia Plurabelle, I done me best when I was let. Years ago, this thought would not have helped. Now it does. I know I'm going to finish more or less as what I am now. It's the very opposite of smugness to take that thought as comfort.

Every day is still a struggle for sanity in a world that contradicts it. That struggle doesn't end as long as one is still around. Physicians ought to find a way of measuring that response. It's a sign of life.

Beneath, beyond all this, there's an innermost amusement. With this matter of relative age. After being the youngest for so long, to be the oldest. There's a kind of symmetry in it. In my artistic taste, I have always had a weakness for symmetry, that most conventional of design ideas. The shape of my life indulges that weakness. In one sense, my life turns out to be symmetrical.

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Passion and Survival

HELEN FRANGEDIS-MONDLOCH

In the modest New Jersey neighborhood where I grew up in the 1960s, my Greek family was often regarded as a pleasant oddity. I remember the benignly curious faces that passed our house on Greek Easter Sunday, onlookers to the festive disarray that took place annually in our front yard. At its center baby lambs turned on their spits, spewing forth great clouds of their smoky aroma. Sometimes neighbors joined in our celebration, clasping shoulders and kicking up their heels to the joyous strains of the *bouzoukia* that bellowed from our speakers. We offered them *Retsina*, red eggs, and the humble hospitality of immigrants eager to invoke a song from their homeland. Over the years, sharing the tradition became a part of that tradition, adding to its beauty and richness.

My family sailed to America in seperate trips beginning in 1955, the songs of their homeland stowed in proud hearts along with a promise to uphold them. Perhaps my family members were not even aware of this promise that they made, but kept it faithfully as the years unfolded.

They journeyed from the island of Crete—my mother and her family from the village of Batolako, my father from the neighboring village of Skinai. I was richly raised on their stories of village life, a paradigm of twentieth-century tribulation that included a melting pot of invaders, and the stings of poverty, hunger, and death. I inherited, too, a wealth of Greek folktales, featuring fools and heroes and their lessons of rawboned morality. These came mostly from my grandmother, who spoke only Greek even after many years in America, and who embodied, in all her gracious ways, the spirit of the folk culture that bore her up. As a child I traveled to Greece several times, bringing with me the visions embedded deep in my imagination, learning the ways of the Grecian big cities and the tiny villages that fostered my family roots.

In the villages I grew acquainted with a slow-going way of life foreign to me in America: I saw coffeehouses filled with old men who played backgammon and rekindled their youth while turning worry beads and fingering handlebar mustaches; and old women still dressed in black to mourn the dead of World War II—remnants of a time still clear in village memory; and young people taking over the toil of the land, ploughing ancestral pathways. In young and old alike, I took in a passion for holiday festivities and a reverence for time-honored traditions. In my visits to the cities, I saw that even city dwellers, though their lives were filled with long queues and crowded taxi stands, seldom sacrificed their afternoon siestas and spent their evenings socializing in plazas and cafés. I saw that they, too, were passionate about keeping the customs they had inherited.

Greek folklorists have ardently asserted that many of the customs and beliefs of the ancients have been retained by modern Greeks despite twenty centuries of frequent occupation and interference by other cultures. In particular, Georgios Megas, the leader of modern Greek folklore explorations, has written prolifically about the continuity between past and present in Greek culture.

The tales and traditions I grew up with strongly support this scholarly connection. Like those I have come upon in my readings, they reflect qualities inveterate to the Greeks since the times of Pericles and before: a burn-

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ing passion, a compelling awareness of human limitations, the belief in rewards and punishments, a great reverence for Divine power, and an interest in the supernatural forces that touch man's fate.

Even as a child, I sensed in my people a spirit as passionate as that of the fiery gods who reigned on Mount Olympus. Like their mortal ancestors, who expressed their zeal in glorious ways—the myths, the plays, the temples, and the rest—modern Greeks still tend to leave an indelible impression. Rarely does one encounter a Greek with much trepidation, or the tendency to understate an opinion, or express feelings with any reservation. On the contrary, most Greeks are quite lavish in their use of superlatives, unrestrained in the flow of their emotions, and extravagant in the use of emphatic hand gestures.

I recall, once when I was young, that an American friend who had come to visit overheard my mother conversing in Greek on the telephone. With some uneasiness, my friend asked me why my mother was so upset. I answered that my mother was not upset at all; she was just a Greek talking on the telephone.

Greeks demonstrate their fervor not only in their expression but in their love of expression—a longstanding pride and adoration for the oral tradition itself. According to C. M. Bowra, poetry in ancient Greece became "almost a second religion," with poets held in the highest esteem. Socrates, Bowra reminds us, referred to the poet as "a light and winged and holy thing."

The sharing of impassioned stories, songs, and poetry remains a pastime deeply rooted in adult social behavior throughout Greece. In particular, the island of Crete is well known for its eloquent *mantinades*, rhythmic couplets of thirty syllables steeped in the passion and wisdom of the Cretan folk culture. My grandmother owned a wide variety of *mantinades* to suit different occasions. In the villages where she inherited them, *mantinades* are still shared in social gatherings, provoking laughter, tears, and philosophical reflection. Their themes include love, fate, and pride in the Greek heritage; some of the most hearty verses celebrate Crete herself and her roots in the illustrious world of the Minoans, dating back to the dawn of civilization. Often the speaker recites the verse in song, as poets did in ancient times, or he may even create his own, adding to the thousands of *mantinades* in Crete's treasured collection. In the following translation, the poet celebrates this gift of the Cretan oral tradition:

I'm glad to be a Cretan, and say so in places I sojourn;
With *mantinades* I sing, and with *mantinades* I mourn.

In the *mantinades* and in other oral forms, Greeks are most passionate in their expression of love—for family and especially for children. Their very language conveys this intensity and, in particular, the notion that love and pain are inextricable, perhaps reminiscent of the wrenching devotion displayed by the mythical Prometheus, who suffers eternally as a sacrifice for mankind, his beloved "child." A common expression of devotion in Greek—and one pronounced in dozens of mournful *mantinades*—is derived from the word *ponos*, meaning "pain." To bear *ponos* in one's heart is to bear great love—and the crosses inevitably borne of that love.

Eleni, the novel by Nicholas Gage, is perhaps a modern paradigm of a Greek mother's selfless devotion to her children, as well as a fascinating chronicle of the folklore of the northern mountain villages. It is the true account of Eleni Gatzoyiannis, Gage's mother, who sacrificed her life to save her children from the Communist guerrillas who invaded and ravaged her village in 1947. We witness Eleni's passionate, heroic spirit most poignantly at the moment of her death:

And her final cry, before the bullets of the firing squad tore into her, was not a curse on her killers but an invocation of what she died for, a declaration of love: My children!

Though Greeks are widely noted for the passion of their weddings and religious celebrations, perhaps their greatest formal display is in their death rituals. One such practice common to village wakes throughout Greece is that of the *myroloy*. This is a loud, poignant recitation—often alarming to the unaccustomed observer—accompanied by abrupt, dramatic hand gestures, such as reaching out to the body, or clapping the hands against the lap or bosom as an expression of great pain.

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Often recited in turn by elderly village women, the *myroloy* consists of rhythmic ululations punctuated by sustained wails of grief. Chanters invoke the dead person by name in verse that is poetic and morose. The following passage from *Eleni* is the chant of a mourner attending the disinterment of a village elder's bones. Its mood and images are typical of the *myroloy*:

> Where are you, *Kyria* fotini,
> where did the worms lead you?
> Leaving your sons and their brides
> to weep black tears of sorrow.
> The silver has lost its shine,
> the flute has forgotten its melody.

Greek folklore often conveys a passionate recognition that we are mortal, vulnerable beings. The Greek oral tradition often emphasizes man's vulnerability and his subjugation to the will of higher forces. One survival from ancient tales is the concept of Nemesis, named for the goddess who sends doom to those guilty of pride and insolence. Similarly, the mythical Erynes, or Furies, are secret avengers of those who have escaped earthly punishment. Mythology abounds with instances of the gods' retribution toward humanity, with protective shelter for the humble and deadly lightning bolts for the proud.

Modern Greek folktales reflect an enduring awareness of these same elements. In one collection of tales, Georgios Megas has included a section entitled "Tales of Kindness Rewarded and Evil Punished." One story, entitled "The Twelve Months," presents an impoverished widow who works as a housekeeper for a rich, greedy gentlewoman. Despite her suffering, the humble widow maintains her gratitude for God's goodness when she is confronted by twelve young men, representing the twelve months, who inquire about her outlook on the seasons. They reward her humility with a jar of gold pieces, and she celebrates by cooking a huge feast for her family. When the gentlewoman hears of the widow's fortune, she ventures to the place of the twelve months, telling them that she is needy and lamenting that the seasons are all a "sore trial." She eagerly accepts a jar from them, but when she goes home and opens it, snakes jump out and devour her.

The theme so blatant in this story is also found in other sections of the Megas collection. "The Fox in the Pit" is a brief tale about a hungry fox who complains that if God had made him a bird he could easily find food. At once he is cast to the bottom of a pit and, realizing his transgression, expresses thanks that there is no water there to drown him.

As a child I heard many stories like these from my grandmother, who acquainted me with both the graciousness and wrath of God. One of her stories resembles very closely the tale of the Pardoner in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. It presents three young thieves who discover a hidden treasure and decide to divide it equally among themselves. But when one goes off to find food, the other two craftily plot his death in order to gain a greater share; likewise, the third poisons a bottle of wine with the design of murdering his companions and hoarding the treasure for himself. In the end all three perish when the first two murder the third, then unwittingly settle back and drink the poisoned wine. Clearly, the ancient notion of Nemesis lives on in this medieval tale, which somehow made its way to my grandmother's tiny village.

Two stories that I heard repeatedly as a child were told as true accounts. They are indeed bitter portrayals of God's vengeance, and I remember still the horror they inspired when I was young. Told by my grandmother, the first is set around 1925 in Kirtomado, the village where she was born and raised. In translation, it runs:

> A child was born cross-eyed; she could *see*, but one eye went this way, and the other eye went that way. The mother and father . . . kept her with them for about four months but then saw that she was disabled—and also a girl—how could they marry her off one day? So they went and closed her up alone in a small outhouse about fifty meters from the house, so she would die by herself and they would not go to jail. . . . The child cried and cried there all the time, but no one heeded her cries. My mother and father were talking one night, and my father asked, "Doesn't that crying child have parents?" My mother answered, "Yes, she does, but they are neglecting her because she is cross-eyed." "And what if God," replied my father, "purposely sends them a child who is completely blind someday?"
>
> And God did perform this miracle. The child died about ten days later. The woman again remained pregnant. In nine months she gave

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birth to a child who was completely blind. God did it on purpose. The parents raised the child, and she still lives. Her name is Margouola.

The second story, as told again by my grandmother, is very similar. It is about the family of a mentally retarded child born around 1935 in another small Cretan village. The child's mother loved and cared for her very tenderly. But when the child reached adolescence, she became very aggressive toward other children, and once almost strangled a young girl. Fearful of her behavior, the father and brother of the handicapped child arranged to poison her food one night, and the mother was grief-stricken over her daughter's very sudden death. A few years later the girl's brother was married, and his wife soon became pregnant. She gave birth to a daughter who was much more severely disabled than the man's sister had been. The couple loved this child very much, for they recognized the sin that God was now avenging.

During my visits to Greece, I met both people alleged to be the products of sin in these stories. The first was an aging blind woman, and the second, my mother's second cousin, was born with Down's Syndrome. The stories told by my grandmother completely overlook any hereditary factors relating to the conditions described, though such factors were no doubt known to her and other villagers. Like the tales from the Megas collection, both stories convey the old idea of Nemesis and the two sins most abhorrent in the eyes of God: cruelty to other human beings and arrogance toward His works.

As a child I also heard stories that offered consolation from God's rage and retribution toward sinners. I learned about a God who was most benevolent to His followers—one who sent riches to the humble widow and who would no doubt forgive the foolish fox. In grand testimony to the goodness of God stands a famous church on the island of Tinos, which I visited in 1971. The main building is a treasure chest of gold relics contributed by people who have received miracles. The origin of some relics is explained in well-known stories—all passionate parts of the modern oral tradition. One story accounts for a small golden orange tree contributed, according to legend, by a man who had been blinded by typhoid fever. On his visit to Tinos on the name day of the Virgin Mary, he is said to have fallen upon the icon of the Virgin with an emotional plea for his sight, and a pledge that he would make a gilded offering of the first object to come before his eyes. When light came to him just outside the building, the first thing he saw was the orange tree, which he promptly uprooted, and then did exactly as he had promised.

Not all of the contributions in the church of Tinos are of gold. More humble offerings, such as icons and craft work, are kept in a small annex to the main building. Quite often, miracle recipients offer a physical sacrifice. During my visit I witnessed several women crawling to the church on hands and knees, scratched and bruised by the cobblestone steps leading to the main building. From his visit in 1964, my grandfather recalled a man crawling to the church with a live baby lamb on his shoulders, along with his wife, who carried their baby strapped to her back; the couple was thanking god and Saint Evangeline for sending them a child after several years of infertility. Still others make cash offerings. My grandmother often kept a stash of precious American dollars on reserve for shipment to Tinos. She did so, for instance, around 1968, when she wanted to thank God for saving her only son from the Vietnam War draft.

The belief in miracles is prevalent throughout Greece. The folklorist Richard Dorson, alluding to the work "of every observer of the Greek scene for the past century," has related the contemporary faith in miracles to the magical beliefs and practices of the ancient Greeks. For the ancients, the senders of miracles were the gods of Mount Olympus, each of whom was associated with a special kind of power and dominion. Though modern Greeks are Christian worshipers of one God, the wide variety of saints in their religion plays a very significant role; each saint is often associated with certain miracles and may be territorial. When my grandfather was near death in 1976, it was Saint Nectarius who appeared to him in a comatose dream and saved his life.

Another case in point is the legend of Saint Spyridon, the patron saint of the island of Corfu. The mummified body of the saint lies in Corfu in a silver casket, housed in a well-known church built in 1599. Believers from all

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over Greece come together here each year on December 12, the name day of Saint Spyridon. At this time the casket is opened and flanked on either side by priests, who receive the visitors as they call out written prayer requests in rapid turn. The priests repeat each prayer as it is bellowed by its owner, whose hope is that Saint Spyridon will intercede on the part of loved ones invoked by name. Each attendant also receives a small swatch from the saint's cloth shoes as a *filakto*, which means "guardian." A common practice throughout Greece is to pin such saintly swatches (or, in their absence, religious medals) to the inside of one's clothing as a means of warding off dangers. The Greeks believe they are sharing in a miracle, since the shoes are said to be badly worn and in need of repair each year when the casket is unfurled. According to the legend, this is because Saint Spyridon spends his nights traversing the island of Corfu in order to keep its gentle people safe.

Greeks show their grand reverence for divine power and goodness in elaborate saint's day festivals and other calendar customs. Like wedding celebrations, these illustrious occasions often take place in open squares with much song and dance and may go on for days. Here again Megas has noted amazing parallels to the galas of ancient times. He sees continuity between the ancient festival of Adonis and the modern May Day celebration at Zigori in Epirus, in which youngsters enact dance rituals about the coming of spring. Megas also likens the frenzied ancient festivals of Dionysus to the modern-day ceremony of Anastenaria, with its musical procession of the icon bearers, its impassioned barefoot dance on live coals, and its ritual sacrifice of the black bull.

As Dorson points out, we also find parallels in some of the more subtle practices of the Greeks, as, for example, in their deference for bread. Considered sacred, bread is handled carefully; the acts of dropping or stepping on it—and, as I recall from my grandmother's admonitions, even smelling it—are considered irreverent. The Christian association between bread and the body of Christ is probably significant here; but as Dorson notes, grain was also considered holy in ancient times, when it was protected by the goddess Demeter.

An important catalyst of God's grace, and one ardently pursued by the Greeks, is the blessing of the parents, as conveyed in this translation of a popular *mantinada*:

> The blessing of your parents seek, then climb the mountains high and steep,
> And fear not if the ground should move beneath your feet.

Just as parental benedictions are viewed as lucky charms, any curse imparted by a parent onto an ungrateful son or daughter is considered devastating. This is suggested in *Eleni* at the disinterment scene previously cited:

> After the bones were washed clean . . . the skull was turned upside down like a chalice and red wine poured into the cranium. This cup was passed from hand to hand so that whoever wished could drink from it to erase any curse that Fotini might have spoken against them in life.
>
> Foto, fiercely mustached and bold as always, held his mother's skull . . . then drank deeply. He had been her sorrow, jailed for murder, a poor provider for his ten children, a notorious . . . braggart, and he had good reason to drink.

Folk views on fate often smack of paganism. Consistent with enduring beliefs in cosmic retribution, good fortune is often perceived as inherent in the lives of good people. Such people are said to have a "good step" or "good hold," and are believed capable of radiating their well-being onto those around them. Stemming from this notion is a standard New Year's practice called *podariko*, meaning "foot work." The first person to enter the home on New Year's Day is believed to spread her fortune—or misfortune—to that household for the next twelve months. The luckiest and happiest individual is thus sought out for the task of traversing each room with her "lucky step" shortly after midnight on January 1.

Good or bad, one's fate is often expressed, according to the oral tradition, through predictive signs—particularly those associated with dreams. There are, for instance, a myriad of portents for death, including the dream of losing teeth and loud bangs heard during the night. Traditional Greeks pay close attention to these signs and take care, whenever it is in their power, to avert the ills that such signs forebode. I remember once when an

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Athenian acquaintance meticulously turned over a fallen slipper to prevent an argument.

Such superstition has long been prevalent among the Greeks. Even Saint Paul is said to have admonished them for this when he declared, "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious." Almost two thousand years later, the "evil eye" is perhaps the greatest peril perceived and combated by the Greeks on a daily basis—even by many second-generation immigrants living in America. This insidious force may be invoked whenever one offers sincere praise or admiration—especially with regard to children, who are considered highly vulnerable. The praise is believed to excite the envy of some evil spirit who, consistent with the old idea of Nemesis, exacts some doom on the innocent object of fancy. According to the historian Alice Scourby, the concept of the eye may in fact have some roots in the Nemesis concept and the age-old avoidance of envy as "the purveyor of misfortune." Greeks possess a host of methods to counteract the spell of the eye, including special prayers and an act of feigned spitting, performed just after the delivery of praise while the speaker nods her head from side to side. The *filakto*, in its wide varieties, also provides a trusted safeguard; the charm specific to warding off this curse is the blue "eye" seen in homes and shops all over Greece.

One could view this widespread preoccupation with the evil eye and other superstitions as a primitive throwback. But one can view it, too, in the context of the Greek passion: in their practice of *podariko*, the heads of the household express their zeal for securing whatever good they can for their beloved family; and the mother who fastens the blue eye to her child's undergarments is displaying just one of her shameless yet painstaking efforts to guard him from the cruel forces of the universe.

While Greeks often appear relentless in the attempt to ward off an evil fate, their overriding belief—and perhaps, as folk theories of the universe go, a contradictory one—is that god's will is predestined and irrefutable. An expression deeply rooted in the Greek folk heritage holds that "All is written." I have heard it countless times as an explanation for both untimely deaths and close calls. Moreover, modern Greek thought retains the ancient belief that accepting one's fate, no matter how bitter, can be vastly "ennobling." This notion is often implicit in the *mantinades*, which abound with references to predestination. The melancholy poet often seems to emphasize this in order to resign himself to his misfortune and thereby rise above it:

My Fate I scolded bitterly, and thus did she retort:
A body's tribulations have been scripted by the Lord.

Whether told in mournful verse or triumphant tale, this passion for life and this love and yearning for its expression are the pillars of Greek culture. They stand proud and prodigious, like the gracious church building on Tinos and the ancient temples erected to honor the gods. The ruins throughout Greece symbolize a passion that still thrives within the fervid Greek spirit—and one that lives in me and that shall be reborn in the eyes and ears of all my grandchildren. In the words of my ancestral Muse:

From Crete the brilliant torches cast their light to all creation,
And Greece was known throughout the world as the immortal nation!

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Books

A Visit with Paul Horgan

WILLIAM ZINSSER

I took such a liking to Paul Horgan's most recent book, *Tracings: A Book of Partial Portraits*, that I wrote to him to ask if I could come and find out how he did it. How had he recalled in such vivid detail so many famous people he had known so long ago? I figured that he was now approaching ninety, and I had heard that he wasn't in good health. "At my age," I told him in my letter, "I don't have as many older models as I once did. But you're one of them. *Tracings* is the kind of writing I would still like to aspire to."

Horgan wrote back promptly—a working writer's letter, banged out on a typewriter—from his home in Middletown, Connecticut, where, as Wesleyan University's author-in-residence, he lives in a book-lined Victorian carriage house that perfectly befits his role as one of America's most versatile men of letters, author of almost fifty books of fiction and nonfiction and winner of two Pulitzer Prizes—one for his history of the Rio Grande, *Great River*, the other for his biography, *Lamy of Santa Fe*. From a visit ten years ago I remembered the house as being alive with literary labors. Different works-in-progress were spread out on different desks and tables.

But I've also found it puzzling that a writer so continuously productive and so esteemed isn't better known. It struck me that Paul Horgan is one of those authors who slip between the cracks of celebrity because they don't fall into any of the usual camps. He isn't an intellectual, an academic darling, or a star of the best-seller list. What he is is a craftsman. He goes to work every day and works to his own high standards. Nineteen of his books are still in print.

In his letter of reply Horgan invited me to lunch and explained that he is now wheelchair-bound with two kinds of arthritis and other limiting ailments. "I feel a sting of satisfaction," he said, "that in the course of staring down these visitations I was able to write almost all of *Tracings* and get it off to my publisher before my ninetieth birthday."

Tracings is a memoir of the type in which a writer revisits his life through interesting people he has known. Flamboyant men and women started crossing Horgan's path early. Chapter 1 finds him as an eighteen-year-old reporter on the *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, covering a reading at the local Women's Club by his hero of the moment, the poet Vachel Lindsay. Afterward he presses onto Lindsay a highly derivative poem of his own and receives a hilarious critique over breakfast at the poet's hotel.

Thus the book establishes at its outset several virtues that would charm me throughout. One is humor; Horgan looks back with tolerant amusement. Another is a rich pictorial style. Here's our first glimpse of Lindsay, who was "famous as a wandering bard, an Apostle of Beauty," facing the genteel ladies of Albuquerque:

> His appearance was startling. Of medium height and stocky frame, he had a thatch of carrot-colored hair that quivered every which way with energy above his pallid, mole-studded face. His brow seemed swollen above his small deep-set eyes with their white lashes. His nose was wide and flat; the nostrils flared. . . .

Another charm of *Tracings* is that these "partial portraits"—some of the sitters are Mary Garden, Frieda Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham, T. S. Eliot, Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Thornton Wilder, Edmund Wilson, and Igor Stravinsky—are also partial self-portraits. Each chapter is just long enough to

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catch what was memorable about its famous subject when his or her life intersected with Horgan's. But it also catches who Paul Horgan was at each of those moments, and the snapshots gradually fill out. We are in on the self-education of a humanist.

The eighteen-year-old aspiring poet of chapter 1 is gone by chapter 2, dislodged by a twenty-one-year-old aspiring singer and painter: Horgan is now a student at the Eastman School of Music and a member of the newly formed Rochester American Opera Company. Enlisted as its scenic designer by co-director Rouben Mamoulian, he witnesses backstage behavior by the great Russian basso Feodor Chaliapin, touring with the Metropolitan Opera, that is as unbelievably coarse as his onstage presence has been unbelievably grand. As Boris Godunov, "his gravity was immense and imperial." But afterward, when Mamoulian brings a gifted young American opera singer backstage to pay homage to Chaliapin:

> The Tsar was gone. Stripped of his wig and beard, naked to the waist at his dressing-room counter, was a great common hulk of flesh . . . sitting on his stool as though dumped there, his body slack with heavy contours like unbaked dough. . . . Rouben brought [George Houston] forward and spoke a rather full introduction in Russian. As he finished, he said in English, with dignity and pride, "And so, Feodor Ivanovich, this is our own American Boris Godunov!"
>
> On his seat, Chaliapin slowly turned. His face opened in a peasant's vacancy. His tongue lay loose on his lip. Silence expanded like a vacuum. Slowly he seemed to hear what Rouben had said. Slowly he focused himself. He made a leer at George, surveying him up, down and sideways, staring him naked. He, Boris, the only tsar, swelled himself upward. At last he found voice. In a cavernous growl moistened by mucus and saliva, with a monstrous rattle of the uvula, he shouted,
>
> "*Boris? B-va-a-a-g-gh!*" It was a howling vomit of derision and dismissal. . . .

By age thirty-two, Horgan has shed that world of music and high theatrical passion, having absorbed its lessons—as we will learn in a wonderful final chapter about his friendship with the dying Stravinsky—and has become a writer, winner of the Harper Prize for his first published novel, *The Fault of Angels.* Nervously turning up at the Plaza Hotel for an author's reception for his second novel, *No Quarter Given,* he finds the renowned diva Mary Garden giving what would be the final "lecture recital" of her career and induces her to attend his party afterward—which she does, emitting her usual high voltage. "Small and delicate as she was, she had an affinity of countenance with the great cats, here refined exquisitely to retain the tiger's high cheeks above the fixed, meaningless smile." Her outfit also helped:

> She wore a close-fitting hat of black silk with a mesh of veil that came down just past her eyes. . . . Her hair was a tawny gold. A floor-length fall of pale yellow satin, her gown was so tight over her straight hips that you wondered how she could step. A short-sleeved torero jacket in black sparkling stuff met long white gloves that reached above the elbows. A necklace of big pearls was looped once about her throat, with the rest of it swaying almost to her knees. . . .

That was the kind of remembering I wanted to know more about.

Paul Horgan met me in his wheelchair at the door of the carriage house; old-fashioned courtesy is one of his old-fashioned traits. His voice was strong, and, except for the arthritis, he looked well; he told me that he writes for two hours every morning. The house had lost none of its intellectual brio. Writing and correspondence were spread out on several tables; art books were propped open to paintings and prints; music was open on the piano.

Tracings began with an invitation from Kai Erikson of the *Yale Review* to write a piece for a series called "Encounters." "I was amused by the project," Horgan said, "and I thought of writing that little Mary Garden episode. Kai was so delighted with it that it encouraged me to do more. Those vignettes gradually came together as a memoir, along with some pieces written earlier. For a while my publisher Bob Giroux [of Farrar, Straus & Giroux] thought we should classify them in groups: a section on writers, a section on opera people, a section on religious people—small gatherings of common subjects. But then we felt: that's a little blunt, a little heavy. These episodes are parallels out of my life. Why not put that life sequence together as the framework of the book? As it turned out, the last piece I wrote, on Vachel Lindsay, became the first chapter."

That was also, I reminded him, the longest backward look: seventy-one years.

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"My memory happens to be pretty good," Horgan said. "Some readers have wondered how I could remember so much conversation verbatim, because I use a lot of dialogue; I want the dialogue to forward the book with animation, and it does. The point is that I've *told* so many of these stories for years that they're pretty well engraved on my memory. So I feel I can claim that I heard what these people said and now I'm going to tell you what they said, either in their exact style or in the words themselves. I didn't cheat much on the dialogue.

"Also, I made notes on many of these people intermittently through the years, whenever I thought about them, on little slips of paper: just a few key words, enough to recall an event or an anecdote. (I don't keep a journal or a diary.) I filed those slips of paper in a folder for each person. So all that material was available to me from the start. I always work that way, even in fiction—I've got to have the design resolved before I begin to write. Then I revisit my notes and put them in order and write from them, day by day, turning them toward me as I use them up, fleshing them out in prose."

"But the detail is so precise," I said. "What Mary Garden was wearing that day at the Plaza . . . "

"Unforgettable."

"You remembered in your late eighties what Mary Garden was wearing when you were thirty-two?"

"I'll bet if we had a photograph it would prove it," Horgan said. "I write visually because I have (in an amateur way) a painter's eye. I've drawn and painted all my life; that's how I see the world. I've also collected for a long time—master drawings. I see the world as I see it in great works of art, which I study all the time. Every day I open an art book and live with it for a little while; it's as important to me as reading. In my writing, that faculty just takes over: to record place, person, fabric, color, light, source of light. When I write a scene or describe a person, I simply put down how I see it in my recalled imagination as if it were a painting. To describe the characteristics of a person requires a certain acute vision. My chapter about Somerset Maugham, for instance—I think that's a pretty vivid portrait of a man. But I remember exactly how he looked and what my feeling about him was, and that came readily to me when I wrote. I didn't need a note that said 'Somerset Maugham's wrinkles'; they were there in my head."

I asked Horgan whether he advises writing students to think in terms of painting.

"One year I took a class out to look at the landscape and make drawings," he said. "We did it over and over, and it was great fun. The drawings were very bad; they had no quality as art, no promise, but they had a quality of observation, and that faculty—how to look—was later brought out in the students' writing."

I remembered that one of Horgan's books, *A Writer's Eye: Watercolors and Drawings*, consists of sketches he made along the Rio Grande before he wrote *Great River*, and I asked how he had used them.

"I used them to remind me of what I felt when I drew them," he said. "I hung an outline map of the Rio Grande across one wall of my library in New Mexico. Then I tacked my drawings all along the river at the location where they were painted, and when I got to that point in my text I'd look at the picture and recover my feeling about the place—why it was important to me."

Thus the painter's eye is also an emotional prod. When Horgan visualized Maugham or Chaliapin or Mary Garden, he also recalled what he had thought of them. That got me thinking about some of his other artistic talents, and I asked him whether a dramatist's skill was also at work in his writing, a by-product of all those years of hanging around the theater and the opera.

"Very strongly," he said. "To me, the sense of scene is extremely important in projecting an event. I want my characters to stand upright on the page and act the thing out. I love the theater and always have. I began writing plays when I was very young. Nothing came of it, but I did write them, and after that I was active in the Eastman Theater in Rochester. That's all part of a continuum in my repertoire of interests. I was a versatile idiot as a brat. I was going to be the greatest painter in the world when I was nineteen or twenty. Also the greatest singer. Also the greatest writer and playwright. Those were all innate knacks—unrefined, but very agitating and energy-making. Each one would have had to be refined to get anywhere, and the knack that kept wanting to be refined was writing. So my decision was to emphasize writing and to use the other

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gifts to support it. Music, for instance. All the attributes of music that aren't actual sound can come into writing prose. Rhythm, thematic development, repetition, recapitulation—all those little analogies of form and expression can play a beautiful part in rhetoric. As for art, because I see as a painter, my pages are full of pictures. Each of those early skills contributed to what I finally developed as my prose style."

Still another talent that had gone into *Tracings*, I thought, was a talent for fiction. I often felt the touch of a novelist.

"I used that knack fully," Horgan said. "I wrote about these real people as if I were inventing them for a novel—with the same animation and color and richness—and because of that I felt perfectly at home in the medium of memoir. As a younger man my main intention was to be a fiction writer. I wrote five novels in my twenties and destroyed them all before *The Fault of Angels* was accepted."

I mentioned what struck me as a paradox: that a bent for fiction had strongly shaped a memoir grounded in fact.

"An interest in the actual—what happened—is where you begin in any case, with either fiction or nonfiction," he said. "That interest then gets transformed into an invented form, whether it's a novel, or history, or biography, or a living portrait framed in fact. But there's no dividing of the ways as to how you get to any of them. It has to start with an interest in the actual. In my chapter about T. S. Eliot, once I remembered that killing episode of how we met at the door of Bob Giroux's apartment, with Eliot trying to figure out how the peephole worked, the piece just swooped out from there. That was the springboard I needed to recall everything that subsequently happened. From the actual came the expansion, the enrichment, and, I hope, a kernel of truth."

The fact that Horgan was specially invited to meet T. S. Eliot during a brief visit by the poet to New York, just as he was invited to a small luncheon for Somerset Maugham when the novelist arrived in America as a refugee from the Nazis, and was invited by Alice Roosevelt Longworth to one of her small dinners in Washington, and was invited by Frieda Lawrence to a small ceremony over the remains of D. H. Lawrence near Taos—each event the subject of a chapter in *Tracings*—suggests still another connecting thread in Horgan's life. Never married, he has been the quintessential extra man, his company repeatedly sought on occasions calling for cultivated talk and social lubrication.

Those skills were tested during his years as director of the Center for Advanced Studies at Wesleyan, where he wooed and presided over an annual court of illustrious Fellows such as Luigi Barzini, Rene Dubos, and Moses Hadas. The most prickly of those grandees was Edmund Wilson. Yet, as I told Horgan, his chapter in *Tracings* describing Wilson's stay at the Center struck me as remarkably charitable.

"It seemed to me we were good colleagues all through the year," Horgan said. "He frequently asked me down to the Ritz Bar for a drink—that place on the main street of Middletown. We had jokes together and many meals together; it was a genial relationship. Later I read his notebooks, *The Sixties*, and he took my skin off in various unpleasant ways. I happened to read that attack on me while I was writing my chapter about him, and the impulse came of course to reply to it in some way. But I just kept on with what I was doing. I went on writing about the year as if it had been harmonious, because that was my truth as I saw it."

Perhaps that answered my question about Horgan's relative obscurity? He wasn't unkind enough to be a famous intellectual or an academic darling.

Amid such brief glimpses of the famous, two chapters of *Tracings* go deeper. "The Vatican's Hundred-Year Proviso" takes Horgan on a scholar's pilgrimage to Rome in 1959 for his biography of Jean Baptiste Lamy, the first archbishop of Santa Fe. He needs permission to use Lamy's archives for the crucial years 1851 to 1888, despite the Church's "unbreakable" rule forbidding access to material less than one hundred years old. Here we meet the older Paul Horgan, a respected historian at ease in cosmopolitan Rome and in the highest circles of his Catholic Church. But the story he tells has all the dramatic suspense of his early love, grand opera.

"Last Days of Stravinsky," a piece written previously, concludes the book and provides its main emotional content. "I was enormously involved with him," Horgan told me, "and when he died it was a great release and also a sadness in every way, because I truly loved

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him. I had to settle myself, and I thought perhaps the way to do it would be to write a memoir of him, to encapsulate my memories in an orderly way. The writing came very quickly."

I liked the phrase "settle myself." Memoir is the perfect form for reconciling life's accounts—for coming to terms with who we are and who we once were—and I asked Horgan what he was writing now. (His ninety-first birthday was a few weeks off.) He said it was a memoir, more personal than *Tracings*, more directly about himself. "I'm down to my last folder of little slips—there's nothing else in the shadows. There may well be, depending on my years."

To be a writer, he said, requires a daily act of nerve. I asked what he meant by that word.

He said: "I mean the nerve that, no matter what other circumstances may exist—feeling well or not feeling well, or feeling preoccupied or worried or troubled—there is a sustaining and continuous and unbreakable nerve that you must tap every morning to get to work. When you do that, you're presumably on the same wavelength that you left yesterday, and it will carry you through today into tomorrow. It's an uninterrupted nerve impulse that goes on and on and on, and it will prevail if you keep the date with it. If you're disciplined and meet it at its own proper place and proper hour every day, you'll produce roughly the same amount of work for that morning. The whole thing is to get to it and stay with it. All the other external things vanish for the time being. To be sure, they return immediately—part of the post-writing exhaustion. But that, too, is absorbed in the post-writing nap and a pleasant lunch, and there you go."

Self-Starter

THE LIVES OF MICHEL FOUCAULT. *By David Macey. Pantheon. $30.*

Reviewed by DANIEL J. SILVER

Even the most celebrated of the Anglo-American intelligentsia have always enviously looked on in wonder at the singular status of the French intellectual. In Britain, a few professors may be found amiably chatting on the BBC, while in America, policy pundits, declaiming on C-SPAN, are just about all that serve here for a public show of higher thought. But in France there is reserved for the figure of the intellectual a uniquely visible public role and even, at times, political power. Curiously, as if we needed to import the prestige garnered by "things of the mind" in France, the American academic world has been in thrall to Gallic intellectual trends for more than a generation. There is little question that the dominant influence on American academic thinking in the humanities and social sciences has been French "theory."

No French theoretician has had a more profound or enduring influence on American thinking than Michel Foucault. As he has now been dead for more than a decade, Foucault's may no longer be the first name to be dropped at academic conferences and seminars, but the terms he made famous, such as *discourse* and *networks of power*—portmanteau expressions made to bear so much weight for their emptiness—still echo throughout the papers generated by these same academic fests.

Despite the notoriety accorded "deconstruction," particularly as embodied in the interpretive gymnastics of Jacques Derrida, Foucault's influence here has been more potent and durable precisely because it goes to the issue of the intellectual's role in society. While Derrida and his Belgian ally, the late Paul de Man, attracted a powerful nihilistic cult among some literary critics, deconstruction's claims to special status among interpretive theories left it just an academic dead-end with no pretense of application to general social or political issues. To be sure, deconstruction's relentless attacks on Western philosophical tradition helped stoke the fires of academic critics of objectivity, and hence in turn fueled the general undermining of standards that has beset intellectual life in this country. Nonetheless, Derrida and de Man became themselves objects of attack by academic leftists, who saw deconstruction's primary lesson as political quietism. This internal criticism gained further momentum from the belated revelations about de Man's collaborationist sympathies, his having spent the war years writing criticism for Vichy-dominated journals in which he extolled the virtues of

✪ DANIEL J. SILVER, an attorney in Washington, D.C., has written for *Commentary*.

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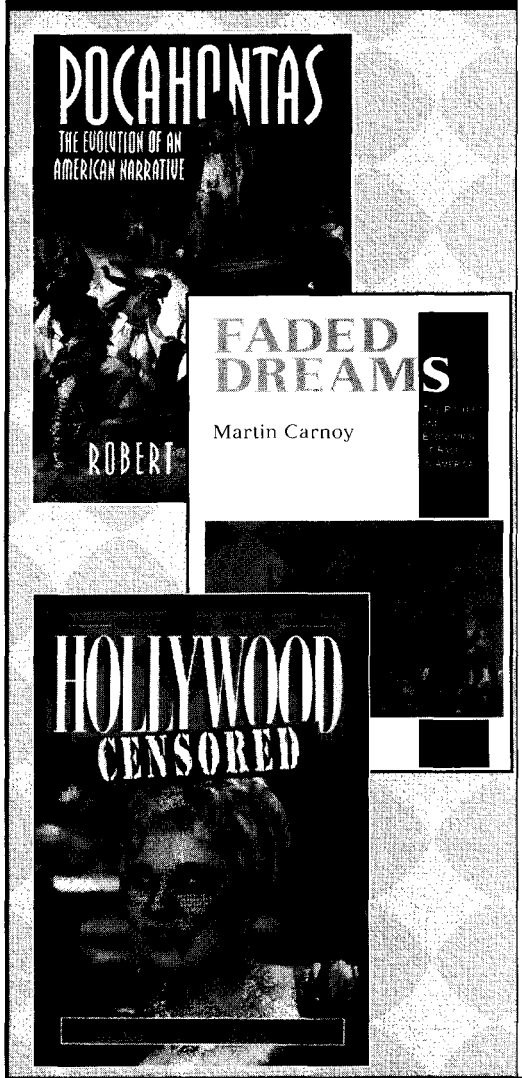

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Aryan culture and wished for a *Judenrein* literature.

The cult of Foucault, on the other hand, grew in influence because Foucault and his followers had intellectual claims beyond the reading of "texts." They articulated a general theory of power in society with very wide application, a theory that offered many left-leaning American academics—and even a few on the libertarian Right—an attractively radical-seeming yet non-committal politics that was temptingly free of Marxist baggage. The influence of Foucault can be seen across a wide spectrum of recent intellectual movements in the academy, from the "new historicists" in literary and art criticism to "Critical Legal Studies" in law schools.

Foucault was unquestionably a brilliant rhetorician, with a mind for startling metaphorical leaps and wild analogical thinking. He was not above invoking the formulaic postmodernist dodge that all his works should be taken as "fictions." Yet to say as much for him was not to deny that what he said was true, but rather to deny that the insistence upon objective rendering of social reality has any meaning. All histories are stories first and last; somehow Foucault's stories were alleged to be truer than others, though he affected to deprive us of any measure of relative truth.

Foucault's American biographer, James Miller (in *The Passion of Michel Foucault*) worried this dry bone of poststructuralism at the outset of his work: how could he, Miller, mere American mortal, presume to write a conventional life of a man who taught us of the follies of history and the death of human subjectivity? This entity designated "Foucault," according to Foucault, was but a "site" in a discursive network. For better and for worse, Miller was nonetheless undeterred by the prospect.

Now another intrepid soul has come forward with a better book. David Macey's *The Lives of Michel Foucault* is much the best of the three biographies that have thus far appeared. For Macey, the mutability of Foucault is something to be taken seriously, not as theoretically sanctioned evasion of truth telling, but rather as the confusions of a man—a real man situated in his time and place—caught between different roles and self-conceptions. With characteristic British astringency, Macey tells his story plainly and without parti pris. What is particularly valuable in Macey's account is a scrupulous record of how Foucault, this most persistent critic of institutional power, was the beneficiary of the French intellectual establishment, and how this soi-disant retiring scholar proved remarkably adept at seizing political opportunities for stepping forth onto the public stage.

Foucault was born in 1926 in Poitiers, a small, provincial city to the southwest of Paris. His father was a reasonably wealthy and distinguished physician, who doubtless had the same professional ambitions for his firstborn son, but the moody young Foucault (called "Michel" by his mother, replacing the patronymic "Paul") had other ideas. It was Madame Foucault who had the most decisive influence on her son's future. Using all her social connections and considerable grit, she undertook to obtain for him the best possible education. Through her dogged efforts, against poor odds for a provincial boy, Foucault gained admittance to a top lycée. After pulling some strings, as Macey infers, Foucault's mother got him positioned to take the entrance exam for the very top of Paris's educational institutions, the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Eventually Foucault passed and entered the elite old-boys' network of the *normalien.*

It was at the Ecole Normale that Foucault became exposed to philosophy and psychology (which, curiously, had not been a distinct discipline in French universities). It was also there that he first became exposed to leftist politics, joining the school's cell of the French Communist party (PCF) in 1950. (He later, in 1953, renounced his membership, following revelations about the phony "Doctors' Plot" against Stalin.) A principal influence on his entering the PCF was one of the Ecole Normale's philosophy tutors (and old *normalien*), Louis Althusser, who was to become the Party's leading theoretician in the 1960s. Althusser was more than a bit odd himself and was continuously confined to the school's sanatorium, where he discussed with Foucault their respective depressive episodes. (In an apparent fit of madness, Althusser strangled his wife in 1980.) With Althusser's encouragement, Foucault launched himself on his first studies of the institutional structure of mental health, which was to become the subject of his first major book.

In this work, *Madness and Civilization* (published in 1961), Foucault posited an alleged

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break in the seventeenth century in the social conception of madness (a claim later challenged by more conventional historians) and made it into a touchstone for change in society as a whole. The change that gave birth to the asylum, Foucault argues, came about from an emerging cult of "Reason" that needed to "construct" a concept of madness as a new category of being—an "otherness," in order to justify itself by essential opposition. Where crazy people once were treated as just eccentrics or village idiots who mingled with common folk and were either indulged or ridiculed, now they could only be thought of as suffering from a disease of "unreason" and treated by confinement, by being removed from common social discourse. This "medical model," a pretense to enlightened care, was a cruel hoax; crueler still, though, was the ruse the more general counsel of reason pulled off in claiming dominion over social discourse, establishing its own myth of self-justifying power.

In common with many other strains in the thought of his Continental contemporaries—Nietzsche and Heidegger were acknowledged as his greatest influences—Foucault's ideas about the essential constitution of civil society drew on a profoundly anti-liberal attack on the Enlightenment. According to these views, far from bringing the light of sanative reason to bear on the human condition, the Enlightenment merely replaced the ancien régime model of social stigmatization and class boundaries with a better mousetrap of domination, which was an improved technology of social control. Now it would no longer be possible to look to the obvious figures of sovereignty and privilege—embodied in court and king and the lesser sinecures—for affirmation of the defining signs of "power." Power was starting to make its way into the mundane institutions of social life.

Viewed with hindsight, Foucault may be seen to have been preparing the groundwork for a new politics, which would emphasize direct assaults on the institutional infrastructure of society rather than, as in Marxist party politics, trying to attack the capitalist "means of production" through proletarian revolution. Yet at this point in his life, in the early 1960s, Foucault had not been galvanized into any self-conception as a political actor in the usual sense. He seemed preoccupied, rather, with his academic status and making a name for himself among the elite of Parisian intellectuals. The reigning king was still Sartre, who became Foucault's bête noire and blocking agent. Sartre stood for a tired philosophy of "Marxist humanism." Sartre did not see, in Foucault's view, that humanism was the inevitably tainted byproduct of the new technologies of domination that sprang up with the Enlightenment. Humanism was just the happy face put on the medico-scientific reduction of the human being into an itemized, catalogued object of a coldly detached "gaze"—recognition of which should put to rest, in Foucault's mind, any enthusiasm for the communitarian homilies of the Sartrean "politics of commitment."

Foucault's book *The Order of Things* received a sympathetic reading at Gallimard, France's most important publishing house, which chose this volume for a new, well-publicized series. Foucault caught the Zeitgeist with exquisite timing. The Parisian *haute bourgeoisie* had by now become bored with Sartrean humanism and welcomed this fresh voice bearing titillating news of "the death of Man." The book shot to the top of French best-seller lists, yet, as Macey wryly observes, few of its many buyers actually bothered to read it. This rather recondite treatise on the birth of modernity made Foucault into an undeniable star. Ironically, it proved to be his least politically marketable book. If being an anti-humanist was a political position, it was a rather attenuated one, and not the role to adopt to unseat the grand master, Sartre.

Sartre had for so long defined the ultimate ambitions and role for the intellectual that Foucault would have to remake himself before he could hope to compete in the same exalted air. This chance was to present itself in an unexpected venue. Foucault chose to take what seemed an oddly timed working vacation in Tunisia, teaching in a local university. It was to prove a decisive turn in Foucault's development as a self-consciously political actor. From 1967 to 1968, the Tunisian authorities were undergoing a wave of protests from newly radicalized students, inflamed with the same kinds of quasi-socialist, "pan-Arabist" sentiments that fueled the Palestinian movement. Foucault was moved by the energy of commitment and solidarity in struggle of these students, and among them he found himself able to indulge his sexuality with new freedom (his

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homosexuality had been an open secret, yet still officially disapproved of—and illegal—in France).

Because of his activities in Tunisia, Foucault was absent during the student revolution in Paris of May 1968 that seemed to change the political life of France. Yet having been energized by the politics of the Tunisian students, Foucault was able to return to France later in 1968 with a new conception of his role. Foucault's emerging critique of institutional power fit well the loosely organized, anarchic, localized politics of these new student revolutionaries—named "*gauchistes*" by PCF stalwarts in emulation of Lenin's diatribe against the "infantile" leftists in his own party.

Foucault was particularly attracted to a group of young Maoists who called themselves "Gauche Prolétarienne" (GP). Macey, in his dry way, captures the peculiar blend of personal emotions and opportunism in Foucault's fellow-traveling with *gauchiste* youth:

> The attractions were considerable. Gauchisme and the GP in particular offered an appealing image of naked revolt against authority which was not without its Nietzschean overtones. So too did the physical hardness of the young street-fighting man, and the GP was nothing if not a man's organisation. Had the GP ever designed an icon, it would have featured a young man in tight leather jacket, boots and a crash helmet defying police lines.

Though Macey, despite his studied neutrality, betrays elsewhere some sympathy for Foucault's intellectual project, it would be hard to find a more devastating picture of how the radical-chic posturing of this austere Parisian intellectual sorted well with a certain rough-trade homoeroticism.

From this point on, Foucault became a major political presence in France, whose rally appearances and ceremonial arrests were almost as prolific as Sartre's. The cause Foucault adopted most assiduously was that of prison reform—a particular favorite of both Maoist youth and his fellow academic leftists—which extended his critique of institutions, developed in his previous books on the birth of the asylum and the "medical model"; it also provided new material for an emerging work-in-progress on the origins of systematic incarceration as a treatment for criminals. The book that issued from this period of engagement, in 1975, was *Discipline and Punish* (*Surveiller et punir* in the original, which gives a better sense of the book's concern with surveillance as a methodology of oppression). If *The Order of Things* had been Foucault's ticket to fame, *Discipline and Punish* was to establish more than any other single work his credentials as a political thinker. It became by far his most influential work, and the one most cited by his American followers.

Building on themes begun in the work on madness, Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish,* constructs an even more pessimistic vision of an even more pervasive sense of reason run amok. Somewhere between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (precision with dates was not one of Foucault's strong points) social power started to become more diffuse, to decentralize itself, and yet assumed a sharper degree of control through the very dissemination of its means and instrumentalities. Foucault marshals an impressive-sounding array of social arenas—in schools, in the military, in the judicial and penal institutions—where a new interest seems to emerge, at roughly the same time, in rendering people's daily activities into an orderly "grid" of rigidly scheduled and closely observed rituals of discipline.

What was really happening, Foucault argues, was the building of new "networks" of power—though one was not supposed to ask "*whose* power?" Power, this new social fetish with discipline and surveillance, became its own rationale according to Foucault. Power was not now to be found in leaders or social organizations or parties or in any given social structure, but was rather a kind of "discourse," a set of terms or symbolic representations that link, in an abstract way, the given instances of discipline and surveillance at work in social life.

Foucault's use of the term *power* in an obviously unconventional way proved to be an extremely opportune move in a political struggle for self-definition on the Left. What the nonaligned Left needed was a rationale for struggle and a methodology that were free of the rigid mechanics of the old Party, and free of the bourgeois investments of the Socialists in the oppressive institutionalization that seemed to characterize much of French civil society. To fight a diffuse "power" was to be able to pick any point of attack in any institutional

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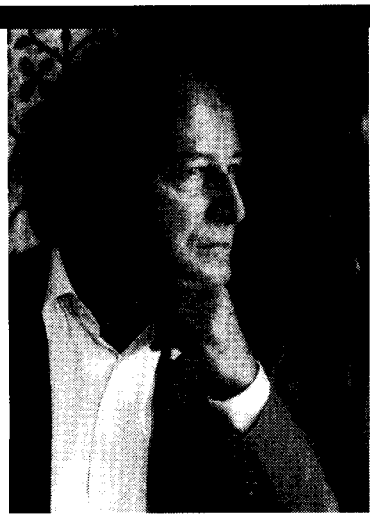

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Roberto Calasso

Translated by William Weaver and Stephen Sartarelli

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setting and do the work of social revolution. Petitioning to free a prisoner and picketing to open up dorm restrictions in schools and conducting Robin Hood–like shoplifting parties (Macey tells of a student "commando raid on a luxury delicatessen" to feed poor immigrants) were equally part of the greater struggle, though these were acts lacking in the traditional leftists' concerns with class consciousness, the hegemony of the ruling class, and "ideological state apparatus" (to quote Althusser).

This sense of importance attached to trivia helped to make budding revolutionaries feel good about "the struggle," even as it should have been obvious from the sweeping nature of Foucault's theory that such acts of local defiance could only be futile scratchings at the infinitely varied "nodes" of giant networks of power. It was also clear that Foucault was willing to make vulgar appeals to the more simplistic implications of his thesis when acting in the role of quasi-official intellectual for the police-and-prison reform movement. Macey quotes from one of Foucault's rally speeches from this period:

> What I do know is that we have to be against power, that we always have to hound it into a corner. . . . We must not accept, never accept its raison d'être, which it cannot, by its very nature, give up: deciding what is permissible and what is not permissible, what it condemns and excludes. We must never stop opposing that, so as to force it, always, to reach its limits, and try, always, to reduce its domain.

Did Foucault believe what he was saying? How could any local intervention undo a network or a "discourse"? Of course he may have been acting in bad faith in order to maintain his influence on a community that offered him a public role and a sense of solidarity otherwise missing from his life. Or perhaps different "Foucaults" were looking past one another, as one self believed in a dream of communal "empowerment" (as we have come to call it today), while another self, as the psychoanalysts say, "identified with the aggressor," and adopted the relentless logic of discursive networks so as to lord himself above the "naive" intellectuals who could still believe in utopian dreams of revolution.

In his final years, Foucault seemed to tire of political involvement, though he did lend himself to efforts to relieve the plight of Eastern European dissidents. As even the PCF moved away from a Stalinist obsession with central control, at least making feints in the direction of social-democratic Eurocommunism, and the young *gauchistes'* Maoism was discredited with revelations about the terror behind the "Cultural Revolution," the Left had lost its energy. When Mitterand's Socialists won electoral victory in May 1981, Foucault, in common with a number of his confreres, was less than enthusiastic.

With the waning of his interests in public activity, Foucault turned in other directions, again reflecting the divisions in his sense of self: on the one hand, with frequent trips to the United States, particularly to California, for hedonistic indulgence of American social freedom and the particular sexual pleasures he found in the gay bathhouses; and on the other, working on a long-delayed "History of Sexuality." In his last works, poring over strange antiquarian materials on regimens of the body and sexual etiquette in ancient Greece and medieval Europe, he seemed to be elaborating an aesthetics of self-creation—as if it were possible to look upon the body and selfhood as manipulable objects of directed discipline. In the end, it was a strange combination of asceticism and epicureanism that he was seeking, one reflecting both the denial of self and hypertrophy of self that had characterized his intellectual positions and self-conception as a public intellectual.

By the time of his death in 1984 (of complications from AIDS), Foucault's influence had faded in France because, among other reasons, his philosophical style had been overtaken by a renewed interest in Anglo-American political theory. The great irony was that as our own "nouveaux philosophes" (to borrow the name of those Foucault-inspired Parisian social critics of the late 1970s) attacked our social and political institutions with renewed vigor, armed with a conceptual apparatus borrowed from Foucault, French intellectuals were finally coming to grips with their poverty of theoretical tradition in concepts of constitutional democracy. As a new breed of French political philosophers eagerly examined the work of such American theorists as John Rawls and Robert Nozick, they had less and less tolerance for a vague style of political thought that could countenance as a genuine

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contribution Foucault's denunciation of a "power" that was both everywhere and nowhere. As a political thinker, Foucault has nothing to teach us about our institutions, though the example of his rise and influence should be a telling admonition about American academic life today.

No Exit

HOW WE DIE. *By Sherwin B. Nuland. Knopf. $24.*

Reviewed by FELICIA ACKERMAN

When I was in high school, I heard a joke about the ingredients for a surefire non-fiction best-seller: autobiography, diet, animals, medicine, and the Civil War. Put them all together, and what do you get? *I Was Lincoln's Dog's Diet Doctor.*

That was thirty years ago. Nowadays the winning formula is different. Write about death and dying. Include plenty of medical details. Include true stories about the terminally ill. Cite some lofty poetry, essays, and fiction. Most of all, reiterate the conventional wisdom about moral issues in death and dying. Death is an essential part of the natural order. Terminally ill people "with a clear understanding of the inevitability of their disease process" recognize the futility of having their lives prolonged by "heroic" measures. And only selfish, vain, and shortsighted old people would want to burden the young by living beyond their allotted time. Put this all together, and you get Sherwin B. Nuland's *How We Die,* which, as I write, is now in its third month on the *New York Times* non-fiction best-seller list.

How We Die is organized into chapters interspersing detailed scientific information about the major contemporary causes of death—heart disease, stroke, Alzheimer's, "old age," AIDS, cancer, and trauma—with tales about dying patients as well as with Dr. Nuland's ethical views. By far the book's strongest point is its presentation of scientific and technical material. Despite his flowery style, Dr. Nuland often succeeds in making complicated medical information comprehensible to the reader whose scientific education ended with a barely remembered Zoology 102.

But even here his political agenda intrudes at times. It underlies his discussion of a pair of related and fascinating questions—whether anyone really dies of old age as opposed to specific diseases, and whether it is possible to extend the human life span beyond what some have taken to be its "natural, inherent limits." By his own admission, Dr. Nuland's affirmative answer to the first question is grounded in his "philosophy of treatment," which opposes aggressive intervention against the natural life-shortening deterioration of aging.

> When it is possible to identify a disease by giving it a name, its ravages become the subject of treatment, with the potential aim of cure.
>
> . . . By giving scientific names of treatable diseases to [the] manifestations [of old age], too many of the specialists from whom the elderly seek care retain . . . their fascination [that is, the specialists retain their fascination with patients' medical problems].

Dr. Nuland's ideology distorts his theoretical discussion of whether the human life span has immutable "natural, inherent limits." He attacks his opponents with such remarks as:

> Recently, a few researchers have been telling us that growth hormone may hold the promise of increasing lean body mass and bone density, and some . . . insist that it will therefore also make people younger. We now hear early rumblings that so-called gene therapy is the answer [that] . . . will add decades or more to the maximum life span. In vain do the sober scientists try to convince the clamorers that it just ain't true, and it shouldn't be.

Of course, this passage will not convince the unconverted. Nor will Dr. Nuland's discussion that precedes it, since the only evidence he considers is evidence that favors his view. Rather than capturing some of the intellectual excitement of this scientific controversy by sketching each side's arguments and supporting evidence, Dr. Nuland shortchanges readers by a one-sided presentation. Moreover, he fails to consider there the life-extending possibilities of such technological advances as or-

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gan transplantation and artificial organs. But such technology, regardless of whether one chooses to call it "natural," is clearly just as relevant to the possibility of life-span extension as is the equally "unnatural" technology of the telephone to the possibility of conversations between New Yorkers and Californians.

Dr. Nuland's main views on ethical issues in death and dying fit the current fashion to the point of being painfully hackneyed. For this reason they cry out for critical examination. He repeatedly stresses that death is inevitable. But, as many have pointed out, death at any particular time is nowadays frequently not inevitable. So the inevitability of eventual death is hardly an argument against life-extension measures that buy some terminally ill or debilitated old people what they want—more time. Nor is the mere naturalness of death from old age an adequate reason against attempts to prolong old people's lives. Childbirth pain is also natural, but this convinces only natural-childbirth zealots that such pain should not be alleviated.

In fact, Dr. Nuland is not an unqualified believer that "natural equals good," nor is he generally anti-technology. This gives an especially unpleasant air to his antipathy towards combating the natural life-shortening afflictions of old age by handling them as treatable diseases. He holds that life-extending attempts for the old or heroic last-ditch measures for the terminally ill are apt to be bad: bad for the patient, bad for the family, and bad for society. These different types of badness are frequently equated these days. (It is not only in this book that we encounter such phrases as "burdens [that terminal patients] and those who love them must carry," as if these burdens were on a par.) So it is important to consider these claims separately and carefully. But Dr. Nuland's "arguments" often run to such remarks as the following:

> Mankind cannot afford to destroy the balance [of nature] . . . by tinkering with . . . the constant renewal within individual species and the invigoration that accompanies it. For plants and animals, renewal requires that . . . the [old and] weary . . . be replaced by the vigorous. This is what is meant by the cycles of nature. . . . To call a natural process by the name of a disease is the first step in the attempt to cure it and thereby thwart it. To thwart it is the first step toward thwarting the continuation of exactly that which we try to preserve, which is . . . the order and system of our universe.
>
> . . . Old age is the preparation for departure, the gradual easing out of life that makes its ending more palatable not only for the elderly but for those also to whom they leave the world in trust.
>
> . . . I speak . . . of the useless vanity that lies in attempts to fend off the certainties that are necessary ingredients of the human condition. Persistence can only break the hearts of those we love and of ourselves as well, not to mention the purse of society that should be spent for the care of others who have not yet lived their allotted time.
>
> . . . Those who would live beyond their nature-given span lose . . . proper sense of relationship to those who are younger, gaining only the resentment of youth for encroaching on its careers and resources.

The first of these two passages obviously gives insufficient reason to believe that future increases in human life expectancy would undermine the order of the universe (any more than past increases in human life expectancy did). The implication of the second passage's first sentence seems cruel (old people's natural deterioration is a good thing because it makes them more willing to die and their children and grandchildren more willing to see them go). As for the rest of the second passage, I have already mentioned Dr. Nuland's failure to show that life-span-extension attempts will not succeed. But showing that such attempts will fail is surely necessary to establish the claim that these attempts will "break the hearts of those we love"—at least on the assumption that those we love reciprocate our love enough to want us to live. And if they don't, precisely who is being selfish?

Dr. Nuland recognizes that the question of how much money should be spent on life prolongation is a question of the distribution of resources. But such loaded concepts as vanity (or greed or selfishness) seem more applicable to someone who places himself above all others than to someone who takes an ethical position opposed to Dr. Nuland's on the distribution of resources between the old and the young. The charge of vanity could at least as easily be made the other way. Doesn't it demonstrate vanity and selfishness on the part of the young to rank their "careers and resources" above old people's very lives? In fact,

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medical spending cannot be intelligently discussed independently of other kinds of social spending. To take just one example, why does a society that increasingly claims it cannot afford unrationed life-prolonging medical care for old people have an Endangered Species Act authorizing annual expenditures of millions of dollars for the preservation of whooping cranes, California condors, and the like?

Patients' choices figure more prominently in Dr. Nuland's discussion of death from conditions he is willing to recognize as diseases, such as cancer and AIDS. His views, however, are problematic. On the one hand, he says, "Almost everyone seems to want to take a chance with the slim statistics that oncologists give to patients with advanced disease. . . . Though everyone may yearn for a tranquil death, the basic instinct to stay alive is a far more powerful force." On the other hand, he says, "Few dying people with a clear understanding of the inevitability of their disease process are willing to suffer through heroic and debilitating attempts to fight off an end that seems close." How does Dr. Nuland reconcile these claims? By denying that terminally ill people whose choices he disapproves of have "a clear understanding of the inevitability of their disease process." "Denial," in fact, is the psychojargon he uses for the mental states of such patients, but it seems more appropriate for his own mental state when confronted with patients whose choices violate his own views.

Consider his account of Ishmael Garcia, a hospitalized AIDS patient whose chart indicated that he had told his wife he wanted everything possible done to preserve his life. Rather than taking this request at face value, the way he accepts patients' wishes he approves of, Dr. Nuland (whose role in this case is not entirely clear, although he seems to have been only an observer) speaks denigratingly of its having been made "in a moment of terror months earlier." But he does not argue that Mr. Garcia ever changed his mind. He disparages Mr. Garcia's wife as "[clinging] to . . . her pledge which would destroy . . . [her husband's] easy exit" and which is skeptically characterized as "what she believed she had promised him," although no evidence is given that her belief is false. Although Dr. Nuland asks, "In circumstances like these, who knows where wisdom lies?" by the end of the account, his state of "denial" is so far advanced that he characterizes the wife's final approval of a DNR (do not resuscitate) order (in violation of her explicit promise) as being in *accord* with her promise that everything will be done. This undermines his overall credibility, not to mention his ringing proclamation that "our own choices should be allowed, insofar as possible, to be the decisive factor in the manner of our going." If a terminally ill patient's explicit request that everything possible be done to preserve his life does not count as evidence that this is his choice, what would Dr. Nuland count as evidence?

His view of this case is no anomaly. Elsewhere, his blanket castigation of the sort of doctor who "indulges a very sick person" by "a course of action whose odds of success seem too small to justify embarking on it" overlooks such questions as: Too small by whose standards? What if the patient's choice is to go for a long shot? Dr. Nuland's humanitarian objection to doctors who impose their pro-intervention outlook upon the terminally ill seems unaccompanied by equal reservations about imposing his own outlook.

In another context, he tells us that resuscitation attempts are most apt to succeed on patients "who do not have [terminal or other disabling diseases, people whose] continuing existence is . . . potentially most valuable to society, at least in terms of ability to contribute. *It is for this reason* that the principles of CPR should be taught to every motivated person [italics added]." The cat is now out of the bag. After all, if our *own* choices are supposed to be "the decisive factor in the manner of our going," why bring up the matter of which people are valuable to society?

In areas that do not threaten his ideology, Dr. Nuland is capable of clearer and occasionally unconventional thinking. He points out that the idealized "death with dignity" picture much touted by the media ignores the fact that the dying process is frequently horrible, and he recognizes that the much-vaunted "final stage" of "acceptance" is frequently just "exhausted indifference." But such observations are only a small part of his book.

How We Die has gotten a tremendous reception, including glowing reviews in the *New York Times Book Review*, the *New Yorker*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. It has been hailed on the Left (*New York Review of Books*) and on the Right

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(William F. Buckley, George Will). As this goes to press, I have learned that the book is the winner of the National Book Award in nonfiction. The only constituency unlikely to share this enthusiasm would be terminally ill people and debilitated old people who are struggling desperately to stay alive. But such people seldom write book reviews or serve on awards juries.

Decadence into Modernism

LONDON IN THE 1890S: A CULTURAL HISTORY. *By Karl Beckson. Norton. $27.50.*

Reviewed by SONYA RUDIKOFF

Blue and white porcelain no longer signifies the most advanced taste, as it once did in the late nineteenth century. And the message of green carnations has declined from a Parisian gesture to a ritualistic harbinger of Saint Patrick's Day. Not so long ago, the song about

> A pallid and thin young man,
> A haggard and lank young man,
> A greenery-yallery, Grosvenor Gallery,
> Foot in the grave young man,

was well known, but now it requires some identification. (It is from *Patience*, the 1881 Gilbert and Sullivan operetta about aesthetic taste.) Faint, ethereal looks were ripe for mockery in the 1880s, and even Virginia Woolf made fun of "greenery-yallery" in the early 1900s. Unless the discourse is scholarly, there is not much talk nowadays about the Aesthetic Movement or the Decadents. Such is the flickering life of taste.

Scholars of the 1890s may edit and compile various editions of its poetry, citing versions, sources, and influences. Scholars promote their scholarly periods and the literary practitioners active at the time, the reigning ideas and quarrels, the personalities and characteristic settings. But is "the common reader's" interest the same? Individual writers such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Whistler, Swinburne, the Pre-Raphaelites, George Moore, Arthur Symons—idols and mentors, Aesthetes and Decadents—are familiar as a-historical literary figures, isolated from cultural history. Do John Gray, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Rhys, John Todhunter, or Thomas Rolleston still invite readers? Or do Yeats and Symons overshadow them entirely? And what of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who died just before this period? The literary scholar can see a reason for being interested in any of them, or *all* of them, but does "the common reader's" interest extend to those who are no longer household deities? *Is* there, in fact, a "common reader," or has the resonance faded in that idea which Virginia Woolf borrowed from Dr. Johnson?

Professor Beckson, a well-known scholar of late Victorian literature, has published many studies of the Decadents and of Edwardian subjects. He has written and edited books on Arthur Symons and Oscar Wilde, has edited the letters of Max Beerbohm and William Rothenstein, and has taught for many years. Among his students were many who later distinguished themselves as critics and scholars of the period. In this book, his purpose is to survey the 1890s and to note the larger outlines, without shaping his work to support a specific argument, as is often done in studies of late Victorian "sexual anarchy," or "masculine desire," or closeted homosexuals or "homosexual panic"—some of the subjects of recent scholarly discussion. Perhaps the most significant contribution this book may offer is its heralding of the modernism of the period just preceding and following World War I. The Decadents were important as an influence on Eliot and Pound; Eliot read Symons's *Symbolist Movement in Literature* in 1908 and was profoundly affected by it, regarding it as a "revelation"; Hart Crane excitedly absorbed the "sacred" book in 1917 at the New York Public Library. Yeats's experience with the Rhymers' Club led to his Celtic immersions and his subsequent activities in Irish literature and Irish politics.

Beckson underlines the importance of myth, mysticism, and folklore in late Victorian England, when the apparent triumph of materialism and science was thought to be assured. He examines ideas about The New Woman as they may have previsioned a later feminism; he notes the way the New Journalism developed as well as the New Drama. He points to

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✪ SONYA RUDIKOFF's recent work has been about Mrs. Humphry Ward, Mrs. Oliphant, George Gissing, and their milieux.

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the invasion fantasies of the 1890s that prepared the way for anti-German sentiment before the First World War.

Relations between the Aesthetic Movement and the Decadents, and with the Rhymers' Club make an interesting story. Earlier, with Théophile Gautier in the 1830s, ideas associated with "art for art's sake" were announced and went through various transformations as the nineteenth century wore on. There was growing interest in the idea of the fin de siècle and the very phrase "fin de siècle" began to be used as an adjective of approval. A late-nineteenth-century passion for Wagner was also one of the ingredients of the fin de siècle mood. In this reading, the 1890s appear as an interesting rehearsal of the modernist movement that was to come.

Beckson's attention is given to writers of the period whose work seems prophetic in style or content. Events such as the Industrial Revolution and the Great Depression of the 1870s set the stage: the Fabians, George Bernard Shaw, the London School of Economics, Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London* of the 1880s, the conditions of the London poor, the suffrage agitation, and the Boer War are brought in. But this history really concentrates on some aspects of the literary culture of the 1890s. Figures and forces whose retrospective importance it is obligatory to notice are introduced, such as the well-known literary man Walter Besant, who wrote a "reply" to Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and responded with vehemence to other questions of the day. But the most widely read serious novel of the early 1890s, Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere*, is ignored because the theme of a clergyman's loss of faith seems less prophetic of contemporary concerns than a rejoinder on women's rights.

Although this work is called a cultural history, it is not an example of the current practice of "cultural studies" familiar in many intellectual circles. Most of the literary activity discussed here takes place in London, but the great Victorian metropolis plays little part in this overview. It does not examine London's history, its social organization, its architecture, or its neighborhoods. London in the 1890s is not *really* the subject. Perhaps the book should have been called *Some English Writers in the 1890s.*

Much of what we now think of as "typically Late Victorian London" was actually bright and new then: the massive Kensington museums, the stuccoed squares, the immense Harrods, built in 1901–2 along the Brompton Road. Where did the members of the Rhymers' Club live? Did they get around by underground or omnibus? Or by broughams and hansoms? The modern reader will wonder also how the Rhymers supported themselves, how many of the Decadents had access to unearned income, or to the sheltering umbrella of fellowships at Oxford colleges. How did their class position affect their ability to support themselves? What difference did it make that the employment of women changed everywhere from the domestic to the clerical?

The shift from the old three-volume Victorian novel to the one-volume publication format was significant for literary history, both in the changes it provoked in the novels themselves, and for its effects on the decline of the famous powerful circulating libraries like Mudies'. But the structure of the publishing industry or the organization of publishing houses or the rise of the literary agent are not given the same sort of attention, although presumably they are also part of cultural history. Professor Beckson considers the Education Act of 1870 and its effect on literacy, but not the later Act of 1902 or the tremendous changes in education or the rise of professionalism which were such important features of the late Victorian years. These structural changes were as significant as the accumulated cultural artifacts of the 1890s and their producers.

Unlike earlier or later literary movements, the English Decadents were not academically based; their roots were disparate, as were their occupations. Swinburne, Wilde, Symons, Richard Le Gallienne, Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, John Gray, George Moore—they don't make a group in the same way the Apostles at Cambridge or those who gathered around John Henry Newman at Oxford did. In fact, most of them later converted to Catholicism, so they were more united in death than they had been in life. Walter Pater was the éminence grise of the movement. Some had studied under Pater at Brasenose College, Oxford, some were friends of friends. But they were deeply affected by Pater and his ideas, which seemed to propose the aesthetic philosophy they were searching for. The influence of the French symbolists and *décadents*, especially as

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transmitted through Arthur Symons, was indirect: Mallarmé, Gautier, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Huysmans all came to them through books. It was not the influence of living among the French that affected the English, except for George Moore and Symons. Perhaps the very heterogeneity in the origins of these Decadents is what is most modern about them.

The idea that art should be produced for its own sake, for the pleasure it gave, not for any moral lesson it provided, seemed liberating in the context of Victorian moral precepts. Art's fidelity to its own imperatives, to beauty, to the resources of the medium, to sensuous experience, was asserted in defiance of other, more urgent requirements. In contrast, some art of *our* day uses the devices of modern art and the ideology of aestheticism to advance its messages about AIDS or global politics just as performance art uses modern dance, drama, and constructivism for explicit lessons. What would those Decadents think, to see their dearly won aestheticism turned upside down for an art concerned with specific ideas and moral urgency, *not* with aesthetic problems? As one of those influenced by the Decadents was to observe later, "History has many cunning passages. . . ."

The filiation from Romanticism to Aestheticism to twentieth-century modernism expressed the primacy of art over morality. Symons's *London Nights* (1895), a work clearly in the Decadent manner, was issued just after Oscar Wilde's conviction and could have seemed to associate Decadence publicly with homosexuality. Green carnations, the emblem of Decadence that Wilde and his friends sported, were worn in Paris as a sign of homosexuality. But Professor Beckson questions whether Decadence was sufficiently widespread even in London literary circles to constitute a "movement." The educated classes at the time were small, and these accomplishments and triumphs were on an intimate scale.

Journals such as *The Yellow Book* or *The Savoy* had a surprisingly brief life. Contemporary reconstructions of the 1890s tend to magnify their role and to give them a retrospective significance that they might not have had at the time of their publication. Other important phenomena were similarly short-lived. The Men and Women's Club of Karl Pearson and Olive Schreiner that met in London to debate the future of relations between the sexes lasted no more than four years, although it has been much studied by late Victorian scholars; its lingering influence makes it seem to have gone on longer. The famous Fellowship of the New Life, in which Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, and others discussed socialism and personal relations, was also short-lived, although some of its members founded the Fabian Society. These seminal late-nineteenth-century groups were brief, spontaneous associations; they would hardly have been noticed at the time they were first founded, but later they came to assume a critical importance, signaling the beginnings of new thought.

The Decadents were not flowers blushing unseen in the desert air, but writers whose work was known to the reading public. Periodicals for the general reader, such as *The Fortnightly Review* and *The Nineteenth Century*, published essays by Wilde, Symons, and others, and the work of the English Decadents was noticed, even if unfavorably, by widely read periodicals, such as *The Pall Mall Gazette*. As far back as the 1870s, Swinburne and the Pre-Raphaelites had been noticed and read, attacked in *The Contemporary Review* as "The Fleshly School of Poetry," but not ignored. Even Zola was known, despite his "pernicious" influence, because his English publisher's trials were widely reported.

How to assign weight to various cultural manifestations of an earlier day is always a difficult question. *The Cornhill*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Atheneum*, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, all had their enduring subscribers, as did *The Academy* and *The Speaker*. More specialized journals such as *The Builder*, *The Art Workers Quarterly*, and *The Century Guild Hobby Horse* survived beyond the short life of *The Yellow Book* with a significantly weighty influence on the cultural life of the period. Think, for example, of the way a paper such as *The Guardian* continued to be widely read all through the period usually thought of as represented by the Aesthetes and Decadents. It was an Anglican paper addressed to the educated and intelligent reader, appearing weekly, and surveying not only the clerical scene but every other department of cultural life, as well as social and economic life, new art, new literature, new music. The critic of the 1890s must ponder the conditions that allowed and encouraged the regular publication, indeed the flourishing, of some of these journals, while *The Savoy*

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and *The Yellow Book* floundered, gasped for life, and soon died.

If the Decadents stood for anything, it was surely to bring into more general awareness certain unfamiliar ideas about the nature of art. Walter Pater thought all art tended toward the condition of music. There were French ideas about complex correspondences between color and feeling; there were ideas about images, sense experience and sensual experience, beauty, the persistence of myth, the permeation of gender, as can be seen in the stylized, often androgynous figures in Aubrey Beardsley's work. Neither social ideas nor ideas about education, politics, the good society, the upbringing of children, or the meaning of history appear to have united the Decadents. Yeats, loosely connected to the Decadents, wanted to promote an Irish political as well as literary renaissance. He also believed quite seriously in astrology, in the knowledge of illiterate peoples, in the power of myths, in the guidance of horoscopes. Symons, like the French mentors, expressed an interest in the life of the streets, of prostitutes, music halls, the urban landscape and its colors. Eliot and Pound were deeply affected by this material and the Symbolist way of responding to it.

Oscar Wilde figures prominently in any account of the 1890s, as he does in Professor Beckson's book. For other critics, he was also an exemplary hero, a wit, an artist, a martyr to Victorian morality. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appeared first in 1890, *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1895, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* in 1898. The complex sexual personae of the period are thought to be expressed in the history of Wilde's personal life and its public occasions. More than any other figure of the 1890s, Wilde has been transposed into the 1990s as a cult figure, his fate proposed as representative and symbolic. And through the example of Wilde, the hidden homosexuality of the past is brought forward for comparison with the homosexuality of our own times.

It is modern critical practice to "unpack" everyone's language: the language of closeted homosexuals of the past; the language of unconscious homosexuals, and of those whose unstable hidden allegiances reveal "homosexual panic." Even the language of those not supposed to be homosexual becomes part of the inquiry. An opening of all the closets is proposed, a general unmasking, as scholars intervene in the past to "rescue" everyone. Wilde may seem a curious hero for this transposed sexual politics, because he was not at all unwilling to keep his homosexuality hidden. Most other "Uranians," as they were called, preserved their late Victorian "closets" or disguises.

Professor Beckson does not make use of these contemporary preoccupations to frame the 1890s. As his material demonstrates, the obsessions of that time do not provide much guidance for the present. The charms of the unknown, of artifice, the poetry of cosmetics, of Whistlerian fog, the religion of art—these cannot capture the fancy again. Still, do the writers of the past really need "rescue" by the present? Thinking of another figure of the 1890s, Henry James, and his grasp of sexuality and emotion, there seems a certain condescension in assuming that his complexity was about "coming out." But Beckson eschews the sexual politics surrounding the writers of the period, instead arranging his discussion in terms of the prevision of modernism and its successful conquest of culture.

The Accidental Family

A WRITER'S DIARY. Volume 1: 1873–1876; Volume 2: 1877–1881. *By Fyodor Dostoevsky. Translated and annotated by Kenneth Lantz, with an introductory study by Gary Saul Morson. Northwestern University Press. $49.95 each volume.*

Reviewed by ALAN RUTENBERG

A Writer's Diary is the title of a unique enterprise in journalism: a series of essays, public and personal, political and literary, that Dostoevsky wrote intermittently between 1873 and 1881. As Dostoevsky explained in a subscription announcement in the January 1876 issue of the *Diary*, "It will be a diary in the literal sense of the word, an account of impressions actually experienced each month, an account of what was seen, heard, and read. Of course, some stories and tales may be in-

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cluded, but preeminently it will be about actual events."

The *Diary* began in January 1873 when Dostoevsky became the editor of *The Citizen*, a conservative St. Petersburg journal, and he contributed a weekly column to the *Diary* throughout that year. After a respite of two years during which he wrote the novel *A Raw Youth*, Dostoevsky resumed the *Diary* in its mature and considerably more ambitious form as a monthly journal, titled *A Writer's Diary: A Monthly Publication*, with only one contributor: Dostoevsky himself. He published the *Diary* in that independent form throughout 1876 and 1877, and then he again ceased publication, this time in order to concentrate all of his literary efforts on *The Brothers Karamazov*, which was completed in 1880. In August 1880 a single number of the *Diary* appeared, presenting the text of Dostoevsky's recent Pushkin speech along with his commentary and replies to critics. Dostoevsky intended to resume the *Diary* on a regular basis in 1881, but he died on January 28, 1881, shortly after the publication of the January issue.

The two volumes of this handsome new translation contain the complete text of the *Diary*. Although it is primarily a public document, addressing current affairs from criminal trials to foreign policy, and responding in some detail to critics and correspondents, the *Diary* is often highly personal in tone and autobiographical in content. And to confuse the question of genre even more, the *Diary* contains a small number of major short stories, which, as Professor Morson points out in his thorough and elaborate introduction, too often are reprinted as works independent of their notable place in the *Diary*.

This diverse array of forms and subjects is united by Dostoevsky's passionate devotion to the Russian people, the *narod*. According to the translator of this lucid edition, Kenneth Lantz, this word has connotations for Dostoevsky lacking in the neutral English word *people*. Lantz notes that "for Dostoevsky, the Russian people—the long-suffering, unlettered, unwashed, often brutish and drunken peasants little more than a decade removed from virtual slavery—were the repository of the great 'Russian idea' that was destined to redeem the world."

Lantz always gives *People* in capitalized form, as he explains, "if only to remind the English-speaking reader of the reverential connotations of the word as used by Dostoevsky."

In the debate that developed in Russia between Slavophiles and Westerners, Dostoevsky held a third, messianic position, considerably more Slavophile than not. His principles originate in the Russian People, who, according to Dostoevsky, represent the "true exaltation of the truth of Christ, which has been preserved in the East, a true, new exaltation of the cross of Christ and the ultimate word of Orthodoxy, at whose head Russia has long been standing." Dostoevsky summarizes his "utopian conception of history" as follows:

> The Slavophile doctrine means, apart from this union of Slavs under Russian leadership, a spiritual union of all who believe that our great Russia, at the head of the united Slavs, will pronounce to the whole world, to the whole of European humanity and civilization, its own new, healthy word, a word that the world has not yet heard. This word will be uttered for the sake of a blessed and genuine union of all humanity in a new, fraternal, universal alliance whose fundamental principles are already found in the animating spirit of the great Russian People, who have suffered for so long, who have been condemned to silence for so many centuries, but who have always possessed mighty powers for the future clarification and solution of many painful and fateful misapprehensions of western European civilization.

Dostoevsky's idealistic fascination with the Russian People and with Slavic union, both political and spiritual, leads him to compose a highly repellent mythology of nationalities. The French, representing a Catholic civilization superimposed on the Roman Empire, the Germans, representing an anti-Catholic Protestantism, and the Jews, representing an anti-Christian materialism, play negative, if not entirely evil, world-historical roles in his Russian messianic dramaturgy. (The parallels to the current expostulations of fervent Russian nationalism are quite clear.)

In a brief memoir, "The Peasant Marey," that appears in the February 1876 *Diary*, Dostoevsky illustrates the autobiographical origin of his view of the People. The memoir describes a scene from his own childhood in which an old peasant generously treated him in accordance with Orthodox Christian virtues and sentiments; it further describes the

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circumstances in which this childhood memory of the People surfaced when Dostoevsky was imprisoned in Siberia. As Joseph Frank details in his authoritative biography of Dostoevsky, this childhood recollection in Siberia became the necessary catalyst for his conversion from an advanced Western social romantic of the 1840s into a messianic Slavophile.

A rather tedious and repetitive portion of the *Diary* is devoted to explaining this position as a guide to Dostoevsky's view of the major foreign policy matter of the day, the "Eastern Question," which had to do with Russian support for the Slavs in the Balkans. In 1877 Russia officially entered the Balkan conflict, and the Eastern Question became so prominent for Dostoevsky that when Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* appeared during the same year, a major part of Dostoevsky's attention to the novel was directed to its final, Eighth Book, in which Levin considers the Eastern Question himself. Dostoevsky writes: "Levin flatly and exasperatingly proclaims that there can be no compassion toward the torments of the Slavs, that '*there is no immediate feeling for the oppression of the Slavs, and there cannot be any.*' "

Professor Morson acutely notes that "Levin's morality, and the novel's, works by a sort of inverse square law, in which responsibility diminishes rapidly with distance. We owe our debt to particular people, not to Humanity." Dostoevsky, despite his universalist claims, ironically repeats Levin's procedure. His portraits of the Russian People and the Slavs include detailed memories from his childhood and from Siberia as well as explicit journalistic accounts of the mistreatment and torture of Slavs in the Balkan conflict. Yet he offers only mythological abstractions of the French, the Germans, and the Jews.

Fortunately, the *Diary* is not entirely addressed to the utopian conception of history and the apotheosis of the Russian People. A brief examination of the February 1876 *Diary* reveals an ambitious but puzzling complexity. It is divided into two major parts. In the first part, which Dostoevsky describes as "our treatise on the People," there are three sections, concluding with the memoir "The Peasant Marey." The second part, in six sections, is a discussion of the Kroneberg case, in which a father had whipped his child, a girl of seven, with excessive cruelty. Dostoevsky writes: "The main thing I wish to do now is only to draw attention in some detail to the speech the defense lawyer made in court so as to show more clearly the kind of false and absurd position in which a prominent, talented, private individual may be put solely because of the false manner in which the case itself was originally built."

Dostoevsky indicates one guiding thread in the complex form of the *Diary* through a fundamental criticism of Tolstoy. He describes Tolstoy as a historian who "appeared just at the time when the former structure of the Russian nobility, established on the basis of old landowners' ways, had arrived at some new, still unknown but radical crisis, or at least at a point when it was to be totally recast into new, not yet manifest, almost entirely unknown forms." Dostoevsky asks:

> Who, then, will illuminate even a little part of this chaos, never mind dreaming of some guiding thread? . . . One cannot deny that a way of life in Russia is disintegrating; consequently, family life disintegrates as well. But certainly there is also a life that is being formed anew, on new principles. Who will pick these out and show them to us? Who can, even in small measure, define and express the laws of this disintegration and this new formation?

Dostoevsky himself, of course, pursues precisely this vocation throughout the *Diary*.

The concern that unifies Dostoevsky's interest in criminal trials, suicides, and the treatment of children, and that relates these interests to his Slavophile views generally, is the disintegration of family life and the development of what he calls the "accidental family." Dostoevsky writes: "The accidental nature of today's Russian family consists in the loss among contemporary fathers of any common idea about their families—an idea common to all fathers that binds them together, an idea which they could believe and could teach their children to believe, passing on to them this faith for the rest of their lives." He asserts that "it is only a great faith of this kind that is capable of giving birth to *something beautiful* in the memories of children," and that "a person must not leave childhood and go into life without the rudiments of something beautiful and positive." He concludes that the fathers "do not even believe in anything, for they speak with someone else's words, they have thrown their lot with an alien life and an alien

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idea and have lost all links with their native Russian life." This sequence of ideas constitutes a "guiding thread" that connects the accidental nature of the family to the larger debate between Westerners and Slavophiles, offering "native Russian life" as the crucial source of this absent but necessary faith. It is not surprising that Konstantin Mochulsky, one of the best Soviet biographers of Dostoevsky, describes the *Diary* as "a laboratory for *The Brothers Karamazov*," with its clusters of fathers and children, both literal and figurative.

Dostoevsky pursues a number of these instances of the "accidental family," especially criminal cases and suicides, in some depth. The Kornilova case, in which a pregnant woman threw her six-year-old stepdaughter out of a fourth-floor window, receives Dostoevsky's attention in the October 1876, April 1877, and December 1877 issues of the *Diary*. His personal intervention in the case led to a second trial in which the stepmother was finally acquitted. Dostoevsky argues that "the crime of this unfortunate woman truly had to be explained by some special, accidental circumstance . . . by just those pathological fits which occur rather often among pregnant women." He is then required to defend himself against the charge that he is "a great enemy of children and a proponent of abusing them." In his defense he notes that on another occasion, in the Kroneberg case mentioned earlier, he stood up for the child, or the victim, and not the torturer.

Dostoevsky is careful to distinguish his humane scrutiny of criminal cases from the "compassion" that states that "there is no crime and that crime, don't you see, is only an illness caused by the abnormal state of society." According to Dostoevsky, this is "a notion that in *some* specific instances and in *some* certain categories is dazzling in its truth, but which is absolutely mistaken when applied as a whole and in general." He concludes, in another Slavophile criticism of the intellectual Westerners, that this notion "amounts to announcing that some new kind of science has just discovered some new kind of human nature," and that the "compassionate verdicts" that have resulted from this notion "have caused astonishment among the People and aroused mockery and perplexity in society."

In each of the cases that Dostoevsky considers, he trains his superior psychological insight in a methodical fashion on the inner lives of the individuals involved. He often begins with a journalistic account of the facts of a case, which he then re-examines in a generous and sympathetic spirit. This scrutiny frequently produces a new analysis of the case, in the manner of a detective or prosecutor. At certain points in the *Diary*, Dostoevsky also provides, in addition to this analysis, a narrative that attempts to reconstruct and to explain the inner world of the characters. In "The Meek One," a story about a suicide that occupies an entire issue of the *Diary*, he extends this analytic procedure one step further, creating an entirely fictional narrative that resembles certain actual cases.

Several other important stories are contained within the *Diary*—"Bobok," "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," and "The Boy at Christ's Christmas Party"—and these, too, are more profitably considered as a part of the *Diary* than as discrete literary works. Yet perhaps the most important literary contribution to the *Diary* is the text of the famous speech that Dostoevsky gave on the occasion of the Pushkin commemoration in June 1880; it appears in the August 1880 *Diary*.

The speech recasts the debate between Slavophiles and Westerners in the form of a commentary on *Eugene Onegin*, with the cosmopolitan Onegin representing the Westerner and the provincial Tatiana representing the Slavophile. In a prefatory section of the August *Diary*, Dostoevsky himself outlines the four major points of the Pushkin speech. Pushkin was the first "to uncover and indicate the essential, pathological actuality of our educated society, historically detached from its native soil and elevating itself above the People." He was also the first "who gave us artistic types of Russian beauty that came directly from the Russian spirit that dwells in the People's truth, in our native soil." Pushkin has "the capacity to respond to the entire world and to assume completely the form of the genius of other nations in a reincarnation that is almost total." And, finally, "This capacity is an altogether Russian one, a national one, and Pushkin merely shares it with our entire People." In the speech itself Dostoevsky states, in a summation of these points: "Having become completely a national poet, Pushkin at once, as soon as he came into contact with the force of

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the People, at once senses the great future mission of this force. Here he is a visionary; here he is a prophet." This would certainly be more accurate as a description of Dostoevsky himself.

Alexander Herzen commented that the Pushkin speech was "all *Russland Russland über alles.*" A defense of ordinary, provincial life against the sophistication of cosmopolitans appears in works as different as Montaigne's *Essays* and Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*; devotion to the Russian People is not required. Perhaps Dostoevsky's devotion reflects not only his childhood memories but the persistent influence of the social emphasis in Belinsky, the great Russian critic, whose extraordinary embrace of Dostoevsky's first novel, *Poor Folk*, is carefully described in the *Diary*.

We shall have to await Joseph Frank's final volumes for a complete discussion of these biographical complexities. In the meantime it would be worthwhile to have an intelligent abridgement of the *Diary*. Such an abridged version might include representative selections of the political journalism, generous portions of the materials related to the "accidental family," full texts of the issues of the *Diary* that contain the major stories, and much of the literary criticism, including the entire issue on the Pushkin speech.

Certainly the strength of the *Diary* lies in its analysis of individual cases, in which Dostoevsky's extraordinary insight is humane, generous, and penetrating. The *Diary*'s moral and intellectual weakness stems, paradoxically, from this same powerful imagination, oriented toward nationalist mythology rather than individual psychology. In his famous study, "Dostoevsky and Parricide," Freud wittily describes this weakness:

> After the most violent struggles to reconcile the instinctual demands of the individual with the claims of the community, [Dostoevsky] landed in the retrograde position of submisssion both to temporal and spiritual authority, of veneration both for the Tsar and for the God of the Christians, and of a narrow Russian nationalism—a position which lesser minds have reached with smaller effort. This is the weak point in that great personality. Dostoevsky threw away the chance of becoming a teacher and liberator of humanity and made himself one with their gaolers.

A Writer's Diary, which reveals both the "weak point" and the "great personality" of Dostoevsky with unusual clarity, ought rightly to be considered an essential document for understanding this greatly flawed, greatly gifted master.

Nineteenth-Century Culture Wars

CULTURE AND ANARCHY. *Matthew Arnold. Yale University Press. $30. Paper, $11.*

Reviewed by RUTH APROBERTS

> TAVARES, FLORIDA, MAY 13, 1994: As part of a policy approved this week . . . teachers will be required to teach the county's 22,526 students that American culture, values and political institutions are inherently "superior to other foreign or historic cultures." Mrs. Hart said she drafted the policy statement . . . to insure that all students never forget that "we are the best of the best." Mrs. Hart, whose own children are enrolled in private religious schools, speaks no foreign languages and has no academic training in comparative culture, religion or government.
>
> —*The New York Times*

There are citizens of Florida who are appropriately outraged by this policy, and it will probably go down in defeat—or its implementation will be shown to be impossible. But Mrs. Hart exists. We've been warned about her. "It is not fatal to Americans to have no religious establishments and no effective centres of high culture," wrote Matthew Arnold in 1869; "but it is fatal to them to be told by their flatterers, and to believe, that they are the most intelligent people in the whole world." Mrs. Hart is what *Culture and Anarchy* is *about*. A strong sense of the continuing relevance of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* has prompted Samuel Lipman and Yale University Press to reissue it, in the series Rethinking the Western Tradition, along with some timely essays of reassessment. Lipman himself explains its timeliness *tout court*: "We need culture, and we

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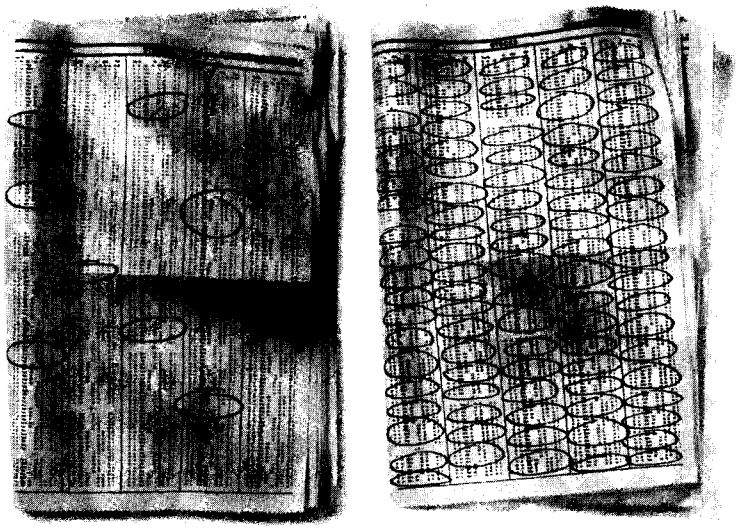

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have anarchy." Culture, for Arnold, is that condition where minds refuse to be closed, but insist on questioning, learning, knowing, and criticizing, in infinite process.

Opinion of Arnold has been much divided, and in recent years he has become the whipping-boy for reformers, a symbol of elitism, a rigid tradition, and a hegemonic literary canon. Each count is demonstrably false. You can hardly call him elitist when he labored tirelessly to extend education to all, and sought the end of the class system through participation of all, in the "State." As for rigid tradition: he himself pleaded for a radically re-understood Christianity, devoid of supernaturalism. And that hegemonic literary canon? He extended it wildly, pleading for translations, bringing in Eastern mysticism with the *Bhagavad Gita.* Islamic tradition with "A Persian Passion Play," the Celts (he is thought to have instigated the Irish Revival), and countless other foreign strains, ancient and modern, through his poems and his essays. He is our prime multiculturalist. You can't even call him sexist if you know his devotion to George Sand and Eugénie de Guérin.

In this Yale edition we have, besides Samuel Lipman's introduction, essays by Steven Marcus, Gerald Graff, and Maurice Cowling that represent a fair spectrum of comment. A lot of the negative comment is the fault of Arnold's choice of terms, whose implications are often at odds with his demonstrable main principles. "The best that has been thought and said," for instance, would certainly seem to imply a rigid canon, were it not that he insists on critical reevaluation of everything, and deplores critical complacency. Another catch phrase, "to see things as they really are," is certainly philosophically deplorable. Philosophy, it is said, can only expose errors in our thinking, not reveal any ultimate reality. Yet in spite of the tiresome reiteration of the phrase, it becomes clear that he invites us to disabuse ourselves of falsities. "To make reason and the will of God prevail" is perhaps the most misleading, repeated, as Gerald Graff says, "with mind-numbing frequency." But Arnold's works make clear that *reason* is not the absolute it appears to be, but intellectual activity itself: inquiry, learning, evaluation. And as for *God*, that was an idea barely articulated in *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold's understanding of which he later labored to define with some success, as "the stream of tendency by which all things seek to fulfil the law of their being." And this suggests the idea of culture, or *Bildung*: the human being fulfills the law of his being by exercising all the exclusively human capacities—in intellection, in literature, in the arts, in morals, in religion, in social organization. But these things are not yet clear in *Culture and Anarchy*, and the catch phrases become stumbling blocks.

Steven Marcus's essay "*Culture and Anarchy* Today" discriminates between its dated aspects and its continuing viability. He sees Arnold rising to the challenge "of how to reconcile progress or change with order and continuity." He would confront the threatening anarchy with, first, a state-sponsored education for all. England had been woefully laggard in this regard, and Arnold as Inspector of Schools had reason to be urgent on the matter. And, second, he urges "Culture," which subsumes education. In his section-by-section analysis of *Culture and Anarchy*, Marcus is generally helpful and sound, but it would have been clearer and easier if he had appreciated the German roots of this "Culture." He does mention Goethe and *Bildung* offhandedly, but the German concept is really basic. The doctrine had developed through Herder, Humboldt, and then Goethe, with all of whom Arnold was thoroughly conversant. It is a concept that arises out of the loss of religious certainty. In the face of perpetual historical change and infinite varieties of civilizations, the human being finds salvation in that harmonious development of all human capacities. *Bildung* begins in this self-cultivation, which is never complete, as Arnold says, not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming, and then turns from inward to outward, to the service of humanity.

This is the matrix of Arnold's thought. He quotes in his first lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, which he published the same year as *Culture and Anarchy*, a favorite Buddhist parable: "Go then, O Pourna: having been delivered, deliver; having been consoled, console; being arrived at the farther bank, enable others to arrive there also." This is precisely the motive of *Culture and Anarchy* and of his whole career. Even Arnold's insistence on the value of the Greeks is part

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of this, for *Bildung* has much in common with the Greek idea of *Paideia.*

Goethe is the prime embodiment of this idea, and moderns as well as Victorians have been slow to appreciate the importance of Goethe to English thought. A recent authoritative study by Donald D. Stone in the 1992–93 *Carlyle Annual,* "Goethe and the Victorians," reveals Arnold as the most Goethean of all the Victorians. *Culture and Anarchy* becomes clearer when we know this. When Arnold inveighs against those who would solve all problems by any "one thing," Goethe stands behind him saying, "He who knows one language knows none." The Goethean Max Müller in the same spirit had written: "He who knows one religion knows none." And Arnold adapts the paradox against the bibliolaters: "No man, who knows nothing else, knows even his Bible."

Marcus seems to see Newman behind Arnold rather than Goethe, suggesting it was Newman who gave him the clue to process/development/becoming. But Newman did not read the Germans, and any ideas of *Entwicklung* and *Bildung* he got came from general intimations of them in English, through Mill and Carlyle. In fact, when Newman asserts in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) that a church, to be great, must have changed much, Arnold comments that Newman's use of the idea of *Entwicklung* to support the claims of Rome is "ingenious" but actually "arbitrary and condemned by the idea itself." You cannot, that is, support infallibility and other absolute claims with a piece of relativistic doctrine. There is no question that for Arnold the Roman Catholic Newman is retrograde, bound up with what he calls in *Culture and Anarchy* "the impossibilities of religion." Marcus says that the logic of *Culture and Anarchy,* in comparison with Newman's logic, is "built on sand." (He may have in mind Newman's noble struggles with the phenomenology of belief in *The Grammar of Assent,* 1870.) But for Arnold, Newman builds on dogma—which is the unthinkable. In the end, Marcus is very winning. He concludes that if we still have faith in education—as he has and I have—we will find much in *Culture and Anarchy* to sustain us, "to shore up our spirits."

Of the four critical essays, Gerald Graff's is the least favorable, and he is a man who has been through the culture wars—and that on both sides, as it were. He explains how in 1979, feeling that with so much avant-garde literary theory "the destruction of reason and culture is at hand," he published his book *Literature Against Itself.* But he then came to think the culture-and-anarchy argument a dead end. Now he advises us to "teach the conflicts" in *Beyond the Culture Wars* (1992). This may seem to make for a curriculum of staggering aridity. It should make one love literature, in contrast.

In the meantime, Graff makes some interesting objections to Arnold. He sees Arnold as the opener of the argument: "*Culture and Anarchy* established the categories of the grammar through which we think about cultural crisis," and he gives us a handy bibliography: Irving Babbitt, Julian Benda, José Ortega y Gasset, T. S. Eliot, Christopher Lasch, Alan Bloom, Roger Kimball, and in recent years a great crowd of others. This survey is in itself of thought-provoking value. The idea of common culture is, as he says, on the defensive in Western societies today, and the attack "is not necessarily an attack on reason. On the contrary, it may be an exercise of reason."

There is a problem, however, in that Graff sees Arnold as supporting "unreflective custom, tradition and consensus." But isn't that what Arnold calls anarchy—a society driven by unconsidered, uncritical, mindless laissez-faire? Graff equates Arnold's "anarchy" with the democratic condition of conflict and contestation, of controversy. He says we Americans in our democracy *love* our anarchies (meaning controversies), live and breathe by them. But, in fact, anarchy for Arnold means something other than controversy, which Arnold obviously loves, as the cheerfully battle-ready stance of *Culture and Anarchy* shows. But to read Arnold as the foe of democracy is false. Democracy is the spring and the motive of *Culture and Anarchy* and of Arnold's whole career.

Education cannot be just for the aristocratic elite anymore; the advantages of knowledge and the critical, open mind must be made available to all classes, and we need the state to ensure that. Morals must be grounded in something better than a superstitious religion. Stefan Collini in his recent

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edition of *Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) includes Arnold's great essays "Democracy" (1861) and "Equality" (1878) as though to clarify the drift of *Culture and Anarchy*. Arnold's idea of culture is one of openness to criticism, of provisionality, of revisability—and democracy is precisely the enactment of criticism, of provisionality, of revisability.

Maurice Cowling's essay gives us a current English perspective and is entitled "One-and-a-half Cheers for Matthew Arnold." He sees the danger in talking about the "best": "it degenerates very easily, on both sides of the Atlantic, into consecrating thinkers who are assumed to be above criticism." He wisely insists on the religious dimension of Arnold's doctrine, his bold restructuring of Christianity, his Bible-as-literature position and his demythologizing, and, accordingly, he sees him as less relevant now. "If he *is* to be used to provide authoritative guidance for the secular societies of the 1990s, [he] needs to be used with the very greatest caution." True, Cowling says, the religious issue hardly matters anymore—in England. But I'd like to suggest that in America there is a greater continuing relevance for Arnold, just because, as statistics show, there is a great deal more of narrow sectarianism going on here than in England—religion close to what Arnold was up against with the Nonconformists, or Dissenters. Then there is a historical lag in America: in 1860, England was the most powerful country in the world, and now the United States is. Some of the English-Victorian cultural problems are here now—complacency and lack of criticism among them. We are so unquestionably "the best of the best." Perhaps we ought to up the ante for Arnold to two cheers? Or maybe two-and-a-half?

Samuel Lipman paints a very bleak picture of our present American anarchy, and indeed he is not short of material: divisiveness in religion and morals, on the abortion issue, on school prayer; the drug culture, the homeless, violence, the degraded popular media, religious yahoos, the degeneration of education. Above all, he sees the state, in which Arnold placed his hope, as having become a tyrant. He includes a knock at "multiculturalism" as mere process, not content. Arnold would have called it *machinery*, insufficient in itself; he would have said we must look to the content and the values it may give us.

One feels Lipman overstates somewhat, and his gloom makes one want to point to rays of light. Rap culture may be deplorable, but there is unquestionably more of the "best" music heard and known currently played than ever before in history, with radio and recordings. TV does have some democratizing effect, worldwide. Our great texts, the "best," are better edited and printed than ever. Museums make accessible more great art than ever before. Religious differences are in some contexts more acceptable than before, and there are ecumenical movements. And students still at times fall in love with great books and great ideas.

For me, Lipman's saddest assertion is his insistence on the failure of American public schools. They can be good, and have been good, and I have seen how they are more democratic and successful than the still class-ridden English system. But these days there seems to be a failure of faith in that admirable system, and a failure of nerve.

We do well perhaps to turn to *Culture and Anarchy* as Steven Marcus does, to find there "reserves of argument, and phrases and language to shore up our spirits, and courage." Lipman includes in his essay a note that recalls the quest of Arnold's Scholar-Gipsy: we are *seekers* still. He claims that Arnold's great value to us is as protector of the "lonely seeker" after culture. We are the less lonely because Matthew Arnold wrote.

To Wit

THE SOUL OF WIT: JOKE THEORY FROM GRIMM TO FREUD. *By Carl Hill. University of Nebraska Press. $35.*

Reviewed by RAY TUMBLESON

Although this book's title is *The Soul of Wit*, the book itself, sad to say, is not. But, then, Carl Hill has something much more serious in

✪ RAY TUMBLESON's essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *Prose Studies, Studies in the Novel*, and elsewhere.

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mind in this examination of Freud's treatise on humor and its background in German *Witztheorie,* or the theory of wit. For Hill, *Witz* is a "praxis," a "small point of resistance," a "result of a protracted political struggle" that calls for "radically historical thinking." Alas, he does not achieve the objective he sets himself; theory and practice remain, as so often, far apart.

The Soul of Wit begins with an introduction that, until its last two pages, consists chiefly of a jumble of quotations laid end to end, virtually without explication. The reason at last given for this is that "instead of opening with a traditional definition, I sought to open up a definition." Professor Hill, that is to say, has not bothered to give a clear picture of his project and then attempts to justify his imprecision, his dumping of a box full of file cards on a desk, as a blow for freedom and open-mindedness.

As the introduction, so the book. The first three chapters race through a number of authors, under a general purpose of relating *Witz* to the rise of Jurgen Habermas's bourgeois public sphere. A superstructure of argument integrating this general purpose with the many theorists cited is wanting, however; these chapters employ only a loose paratactical structure (a.k.a. one damned thing after another). But if one needs to find out about this particular corner of German intellectual history, Hill has the goods. One is compelled to suppose that the material is not available elsewhere, since Hill is largely silent as to predecessors. Still, it would be nice, if he indeed has conducted hitherto neglected research, if he would boldly claim as much. If, on the other hand, his work is indebted to earlier studies, he might mention them. Secondary sources, though, are here remarkably scarce for a work of academic criticism.

A certain air of negligence pervades this book. After the unintroducing introduction and breakneck tour through two centuries of mostly obscure authors, it arrives at its main business, a 140-page analysis of Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious.* In the discussion of Freud, one cannot complain of a lack of detail, although one might wonder whether the most productive use is always made of it. The shallowness of Hill's alleged "radically historical thinking" is suggested in the strictly hierarchal treatment of the canoni-

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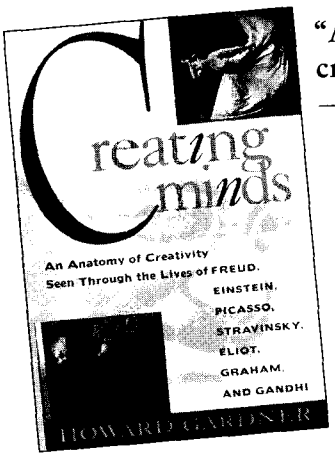

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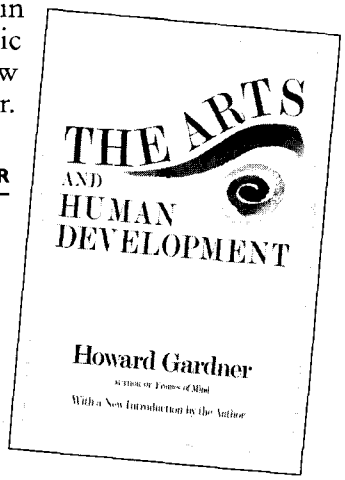

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cal and non-canonical in this study. Although the book's subtitle asserts that the subject is "Joke Theory from Grimm to Freud," Hill actually begins a century before Grimm and devotes no especially great attention to him: his is just a familiar name, thanks to fairy tales, to place in the title, and his importance, like that of the dozens of other pre-Freudian theorists briefly discussed, is as nothing compared to Freud.

Such an attitude might be made defensible. One can argue that Freud is much more important than Dominique Bouhours or Georg Friedrich Meier. Hill does not so argue, however, because to do so would place him in the camp of the old fogies, the white-bearded patriarchs, and he is eager "to restore a subversive force to laughter." In other words, he at once tacitly assumes that the canonical author is far more important than the non-canonical—Freud alone occupies two-thirds of the volume—and he wants to posture as radical, as historicist, as on the side of the counter-canonical angels. He could seek to uncouple questions of canonicity from those of emancipation, but that would require at once a clarification of his purpose and a visible dissent from the main currents of historicist criticism today. And he distinctly prefers not to dissent. Given this conflict, it is hard not to suspect that the work begins by refusing to define its field less out of a desire to emancipate thought from a theoretical straitjacket than out of an inability to reconcile the contradictory elements of his project.

The best part of his critique of *Witztheorie* is Hill's perception of a "Janus-faced . . . polyvalence" of a *Witz* "entangled in an economic logic which, as we have seen, has both emancipatory and repressive moments." He seems incapable, though, of convincingly connecting the general and the particular. When he tries to develop his central perception, he ends up with confused repetitions of the formula instead of a deepening of understanding. His claim that the columns of a newspaper humorist in turn-of-the-century Vienna are "both a compromise with the patriarchal Logos of banality and subversive of it" do not elaborate his thesis but repeat it in other, clumsier language. Such an expression as "patriarchal Logos" is improper here not because, in itself, it is a piece of jargon that ought not to be permissible in proper discourse, but because Hill is at a loss how to deploy it in *his* discourse. "The patriarchal Logos of banality" is poor writing because it is using words for their fashionable air rather than because they actually mean anything very precisely. In "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell argued that political writing is often turgid and unmeaning because it is attempting to "defend the indefensible." Hill's prose, though, appears turgid and unmeaning not in the interests of any sinister totalitarian ideology but because he wants to be taken for something he is not—namely, a deep thinker.

It is a pity that he permitted himself to be tempted to try to keep up with academic criticism's equivalent of the jet set; some people are just not cut out for the fast lane. *The Soul of Wit* accumulates many examples of contradictory uses of *Witz*: the aristocrat or bourgeois wittily snubs the Jew or woman or worker and the Jew or woman or worker wittily undercuts the aristocrat or bourgeois. The net effect of all the contradictory definitions and manipulations that Hill marshals tends to support the self-canceling and amoral conception of wit posited by the post-structuralists whom he condemns in his epilogue for their neglect of the "utopian" dimension of *Witz*. He declares, in his epilogue, that "*Witz* was both bearer and critic of this process of rationalization" from the Enlightenment to Freud, but he also hopes that "the progressive tradition it represents might still help guide us in creating a society where the needs of the millions who live in want are met," and concludes his volume on this note: "Let this study stand then as a contribution to the revival of a thoughtful Groucho Marxism and as a call to action. Tell a joke, change the world." Yes, it is a joke, but such a feeble one. Apparently, the direction of Hill's thinking is that wit is good and progress is good, so there must be some connection between the two, if he could only figure it out. But he never does. "Humor, from satiric polemic to comic put-down to absurdist put-on, has always been an important weapon in the arsenal of the Left," Hill writes, "and not only in the German tradition with which I have been dealing." True, but humorous reactionaries have been no less legion, including the ones he himself has quoted.

The Soul of Wit is not a worthless book. Besides the assemblage of material on intellec-

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tual history, the discussion of the relationship between Jewishness and humor in the Vienna that would teach Hitler all he needed to know about anti-Semitism is valuable. But its thinness and confusion of thought condemn this book to being more useful as a source than as an original work of scholarly imagination. One only wishes Hill had dared to concentrate on the more traditional aspects of his study, where he is at his best. His final attempt to pose as radical is unconvincing because it is so obviously an attempt at a final flourish without adequate support from what precedes; he can dislike but not bridge the chasm between the Enlightenment narrative of linear progress and post-modern disruptions of that master plot. Hill is actually an old-fashioned liberal humanist in his hostility to post-structuralism and plangent faith in a progress his steadily accumulating evidence has just been calling into question for the preceding two hundred pages. Ashamed to admit it, he chooses instead to play that saddest of contemporary figures, the grandpa hipster.

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The Stupidest of Great Poets

TENNYSON. *By Peter Levi. Scribner's. $30.*

Reviewed by EVELYN TOYNTON

His father was a drunkard, and in his last years a violent one. One of his brothers wound up in a lunatic asylum for life, another was an opium addict, still another a hopeless depressive. He himself was prey to various dark moods when young, as well as trance-like states in which he heard his own name called over and over. He was painfully sensitive to criticism, so much so that the cruel reception accorded a book of his youthful poems made him stop publishing for ten years.

It sounds very much like the early life of one of our modern American poets—John Berryman, say, or Robert Lowell. One can imagine a psychoanalytic biography recounting in grim detail the story of his deterioration in adulthood: the breakdowns, the broken marriages, the onslaught of despair and the sense of isolation, the writer's block, the recurring stay in institutions.

But this is Tennyson, not Berryman, and in fact his later life was an almost unbroken series of triumphs. After a wait of seventeen years, during which the father of his intended would not permit the marriage to take place because one of his other daughters had married Alfred's opium-addict brother and had a nervous breakdown herself, the poet was finally wed to his dear Emily. They had two sons whom they adored and a wonderfully happy family life. He was made Laureate. Poetry flowed out of him in a nearly unbroken stream; he became rich from the sales of his work and lived with his family in a beautiful rambling house he had built on the Isle of Wight. He was friends with all the great men of his age, Gladstone and Carlyle and Dickens as well as Browning and other fellow poets. The queen, a great admirer of his work, rewarded him with a baronetcy. For long periods, his greatest source of discontent was the plague of admirers who showed up with the hope of catching a glimpse of him.

Yet always in Tennyson's work there is a strain of melancholy, a note of lamentation

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and sorrow. It is easy to see why T. S. Eliot called him "the saddest of English poets." At the same time, we find little of vivid anguish, of the sort of wrenching grief that, in art, can be disturbing and exalting at the same time. Even *In Memoriam*—that quintessential product of the Victorian age, in which Tennyson mourns and commemorates his beloved friend Arthur Hallam, who died in 1833 of a freak illness at age twenty-three—has about it a kind of lolling smoothness, for all its questioning of the ways of God. In something of the same way, Peter Levi, in his elegant and erudite new biography of the poet, glides over the terrain of Tennyson's life with an imperturbable serenity, never bogging down in psychoanalytic speculation or a morass of detail. The only thing one might fault him for is that he leaves us at times with the slight feeling of unreality that can also come from reading too much Tennyson at one sitting—a faint numbness occasionally creeps in as the sonorous sentences roll over us.

Levi, an accomplished poet himself, is most impassioned in his discussions of Tennyson's art, which he clearly loves. He is always pausing in his narrative to bring our attention to a particularly charming line or verse; he has a lively appreciation for the particular Tennysonian music that has fallen out of favor in recent times. While he freely acknowledges the falling off of Tennyson's late work and the vapidity of even some of his most accomplished early lyrics, he is generous in his evaluations and offers astute comments on the technical beauties of the lines under discussion. There is pleasure to be gained merely from witnessing his own pleasure in certain passages, in the perfection of sound and cadence that was Tennyson's great gift.

Yet there are times when one starts to wonder if delicate music is quite enough:

> I climbed the roofs at break of day;
> Sun-smitten Alps before me lay.
> I stood among the silent statues,
> And statued pinnacles, mute as they.
>
> How faintly-flushed, how phantom-fair,
> Was Monte Rosa, hanging there
> A thousand shadowy-pencilled valleys,
> And snowy dells in a golden air.

Levi tells us: "The words melt in the mouth; they indicate pure pleasure, yet they are memorable"—all of which is eminently true. One may balk, however, when Levi then goes on to note admiringly, "It is extraordinary that an English poem about mountains, written in the shadow of Wordsworth, should permit no shade of metaphysics, be completely physical." It is not really clear why this should be regarded as such an accomplishment. In fact, large doses of Tennyson can make one positively long for Wordsworth, whose poetry is steeped in thinking, in moral reflection, in a way that makes it seem infinitely more weighted, more urgent in its claim on our attention, than Tennyson's mellifluous lyricism.

Similarly, Levi calls on us to admire "that extraordinary Blake-like ditty [Tennyson] called 'The Poet's Song' ":

> The rain had fallen, the Poet arose
> He passed by the town and out of the street,
> A light wind blew from the gates of the sun,
> And waves of shadow went over the wheat,
> And he sat him down in a lonely place,
> And chanted a melody loud and sweet,
> That made the wild swan pause in her cloud,
> And the lark drop down at his feet.

This is indeed lovely; it has a kind of dreamy perfection, yet we can't help thinking that, if Blake *had* written it, it might have been just as song-like while also having something arresting to say. Auden called Tennyson "of all the great poets undoubtedly the stupidest" (a line Levi tactfully refrains from quoting), and Tennyson does at times sound like nothing so much as a burbling brook. No one else could have written this so well, we feel, while at the same time hungering for something less ethereal, more charged with meaning.

Of course, it is not fair to blame Tennyson for not being Blake or Wordsworth—to blame Victorian poetry in general for representing a falling off from that burst of poetic genius that was English Romanticism. Nor is Levi concerned with spinning theories or making generalizations; his approach is to pay scrupulous attention to the poems themselves, often stanza by stanza. But it might have added to the interest of his book if he had discussed the phenomenon of Tennyson in the context of his great predecessors. It is curious, especially given Tennyson's interest in science, to consider how the most famous poet of the first great Industrial Age should so willfully have

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turned from all modern themes and subjects to the cloudy medieval and mythical past. It is surely no coincidence that, whereas the Romantics wrote most brilliantly of their own interior struggles, Tennyson's greatest accomplishments were in poems such as "Tithonus" and "Ulysses" and "Mariana of the South" and "The Lady of Shallott." His great epic work was about King Arthur rather than, as with Wordsworth, the growth of his own mind. His was the first poetry of conscious escape from the age in which he lived, the first body of work that represented a sort of defeat in the face of contemporary experience. It is easy to forget, looking at the wonderful Julia Margaret Cameron photograph of Tennyson in his magnificent cape and hat, his flowing beard, that he was just as much an anomaly in his own day as he would be in ours—it was not as though everybody in Victorian England looked like that. Tennyson may have been the first English poet to look consciously poetic. Consider Coleridge, who looked like a fat burgher; Wordsworth, who looked like a cross between Ichabod Crane and a Dissenting minister. Keats never dressed up in strange costumes or grew his hair extravagantly long; even Shelley was not much given to flamboyant modes of dress.

On the other hand, Tennyson was also one of the nicest of poets—benevolent and kindly, loyal to his friends, honorable in his dealings with the world, a loving father who, when one of his sons was returning from his boarding school for the holidays, festooned the house with banners and celebrated for days. Levi is splendid at conveying the pleasures and the kindnesses of the poet; where he falls down is in describing his emotional trials. When the same much-loved son dies in early middle age, Levi introduces the fact into his narrative by telling us that "For 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After' the influences suggested have been many and amazing, indeed so much so as to indicate that critics have been at a loss. We know that Lord Tennyson's son died while he was writing it, but that has left little mark on the poem. The description of a son who dies saving others and loved the good and the true is the merest feint towards a gesture of memory." We then get a one-sentence description of the circumstances of Lionel Tennyson's death before Levi returns to a discussion of the poem, after which he tells us that "He [that is, the poet] was deeply grieved over the Irish question. Yet he could enjoy places and landscapes, and even the theatre."

Surely there is something a little odd about this way of handling the matter—just as it seems odd that we are told so little about Tennyson's feelings when his brother was committed to an asylum for life, or that his reaction to his father's death is presented thusly: "His pitiable deathbed in the country was such another world from Cambridge that we should surely regard it from Alfred's point of view as just a distraction. . . . He was sorry not to have written home. He cared, but only in passionate fits. On the night his father finally died he slept in the old man's bed in the hope of seeing his ghost."

But with all the psychological prying that goes on in biographies nowadays, perhaps we should simply be grateful for Peter Levi's respectful attitude toward his subject, his gentle delight in Tennyson's eccentricities. It is probably better to maintain a decent reticence than to adopt an air of superior understanding, better to discuss Tennyson in the terms of his own age than in those of twentieth-century Freudianism. Certainly this is Levi's own view.

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The Richard III Society, Schallek Awards Office
303 Vine Street, Suite 106, Philadelphia, PA 19106

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"The danger for a biographer now," he says, "is to be too knowing, to question too much; there is after all a certain important truth in the family love which has sought to cover the poet's sores and to reduce him (as in life he could never be reduced) to late Victorian propriety." Tennyson hated biographies in general, and dreaded his own in particular. One can imagine that, of all the books about him since his son Hallam's, written shortly after his death, he might have liked Levi's best of all.

Wolves and Sheep

THE CONSTITUTIONAL THOUGHT OF THOMAS JEFFERSON. *By David N. Mayer. University Press of Virginia. $39.50.*

Reviewed by PAUL A. RAHE

It is instructive to visit the Lincoln Monument and then the Jefferson Memorial. The first of the two monuments is perhaps the finest public building in America. Within a classical temple, one finds the nation's sixteenth president seated on the curule chair of a Roman consul; the statue is posed in a manner that conveys not only Lincoln's dignity and grandeur but also the terrible sadness that was his lot; and on the walls one finds carved his two greatest and most distinctive utterances: the speech delivered on the battlefield at Gettysburg and his Second Inaugural Address. Few visitors fail to be moved.

The Jefferson Memorial is far less successful. The neoclassical building set alongside the Tidal Basin is lovely and does justice to Jefferson's contribution to American architecture, but the statue within is too large and imposing for the room it occupies. In making Jefferson seem larger than life, the artist made him appear inhuman as well. To make matters worse, the brief quotations carved in stone above and on the four panels set in the walls have been edited and taken out of context; some have been bowdlerized; and even those accurately rendered have been carefully selected to convey a false impression by glossing over some of the elements that are most prominent within the historical record.

That some themes should be neglected is, of course, perfectly understandable. Jefferson was a man of so many parts that no monument could do justice to them all. Moreover, in 1939, when construction began, no one wanted to celebrate the unfortunate speculations concerning racial differences that the author of the Declaration of Independence included in his *Notes on the State of Virginia.* But some of the omissions are less easily explained. Nowhere, for example, does one find anything like the sentence in Jefferson's First Inaugural Address praising as "the sum of good government . . . a wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned." Nowhere does one read anything even remotely comparable to the passage that Jefferson inserted in his draft of the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798, arguing that "confidence is everywhere the parent of despotism," that "free government is founded in jealousy, and not in confidence," and that "it is jealousy and not confidence which prescribes limited constitutions, to bind down those whom we are obliged to trust with power." Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who spoke at the ceremony celebrating the laying of the monument's cornerstone, had the Jefferson Memorial built in order to establish the legitimacy of his claim to be the natural heir of our nation's third president. Roosevelt had no interest in reminding those within his party of the degree to which he had repudiated its heritage, and he did not do so.

To rediscover the Jefferson who was displaced and surreptitiously buried by the New Deal, one need only turn to this careful study of his constitutionalism. David N. Mayer mentions neither the Jefferson Memorial nor FDR. He is a professor of law; his book began as a dissertation in history; and he sticks to his last throughout. But this work serves to remind us of much that more popular studies have been inclined to neglect. Mayer takes it as his task to make sense of Jefferson as a practitioner of the politics of distrust—fearful always that "the natural progress of things is for liberty to yield, and government to gain

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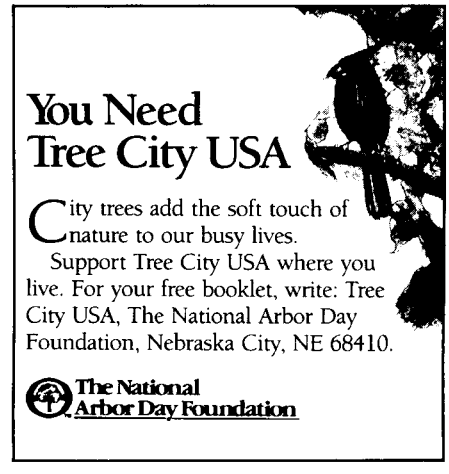
ground." Again and again, he reminds us of the letter in which the republican stalwart first observed that the Europeans "have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheep," and then remarked to his correspondent that, if the people of America should become "inattentive to the public affairs, you and I, and Congress, and Assemblies, judges and governors shall become wolves."

Mayer lays the groundwork for his analysis by discussing Jefferson's early education. He emphasizes his studies in Whig history, enlightenment philosophy, and English law, and he traces the debt that he owed to the thinking of James Harrington, John Locke, Algernon Sidney, and the radicals known collectively as the Real or True Whigs. Much of this is familiar, but Mayer argues persuasively that, in a body of literature in which J. G. A. Pocock and his many admirers have been inclined to find a celebration of civic humanist and classical republican themes, the careful reader will find little but libertarianism. Such, Mayer contends, was the common heritage of the revolutionary generation.

Jefferson was distinguished from the majority of his fellow Founders by the depth of the confidence that he had in the capacity of the American people to rule themselves. Mayer quite plausibly suggests that in outlook Jefferson was closest to Thomas Paine. It was the latter who wrote, "Society is produced by our wants and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness *positively* by uniting our affections, the latter *negatively* by restraining our vices. . . . Society in every state is a blessing, but Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil." Jefferson agreed with every particular. Both accepted in outline the natural rights doctrine elaborated by John Locke and his successors, and both qualified Locke's teaching by championing the idea of man's natural sociability as articulated in the works of the third Earl of Shaftesbury, in the essays of Lord Bolingbroke, and in the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment. Paine would not have quibbled with Jefferson's claim that one of the basic principles of government is "a sound spirit of legislation, which, banishing all arbitrary and unnecessary restraint on individual action, shall leave us free to do whatever does not violate the equal rights of others." He, too, viewed expansively "the degree of freedom and self-government in which a society may venture to leave its individual members," and he was perfectly capable of celebrating republican government as that form which leaves human beings free to conduct their lives "under the unrestrained and unperverted operation of their own understandings."

In exploring Jefferson's elaboration of the logic dictating the American Revolution, in discussing his treatment of the case for republican government, and in tracing the evolution of his understanding of the political architecture appropriate to such a polity, Mayer returns at each juncture to Jefferson's eagerness that the American experiment in self-government test as fully as possible the capacity of men to run their own affairs. As Mayer demonstrates, it was this concern which underlay Jefferson's demand that a bill of rights be added to the Constitution, and it dictated as well his opposition to Alexander Hamilton's system, his insistence on restricting federal power, his defense of states' rights and local government, his attempts to delimit the executive power while asserting the prerogatives of the president within the sphere of foreign affairs, the bitterness with which he viewed John Marshall's conduct in office as chief justice, his critique of judicial supremacy, and his willingness to sanction frequent constitutional revision. One emerges from reading this book with a sense that, when Jeffersonian constitutionalism was jettisoned, the welfare state was established, and the federal government began to engulf the states, though much may have been gained, something essential was also lost.



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The Reader Replies

Russian Revolution

In his effort to downplay the role of Marxism in rendering Soviet life unbearable, Richard Pipes in "Did the Russian Revolution Have to Happen?" (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Spring 1994) observes that in Russia "Marxism fell on a soil devoid of traditions of self-rule, observance of law, and respect for private property." Elsewhere, he thinks, the plant might have developed its "libertarian" potential.

In Russia, however, the soil was suited perfectly to the plant, for Marxism has always regarded republican self-rule as a chimera, objective law as a bourgeois mystification, and private property as something to be abolished.

A world without those limits to political power is naturally the world of "inhuman cruelty" to which Pipes refers. It is the world we may expect to see wherever the experiment of unlimited government is fairly tried. Lord Acton, Isabel Paterson, Friedrich Hayek, and others too numerous to mention explained this a long time ago. Pipes should take a short vacation from the details of Muscovite history and re-read these authors. He might also re-read Marx and his epigones. They meant what they said.

STEPHEN COX
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Murder as One of the Liberal Arts

The essay "Murder as One of the Liberal Arts" by James Hitchcock (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Spring 1994) was most refreshing and provocative in its literary claims for true-crime fiction. The genealogy of the genre is not absolutely evident, but I would like to propose a possible progenitor for the field who is clearly contemporary with De Quincey, with whom the essay opens. Readers of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR might want to consider the candidacy of Edgar Allan Poe, already often credited with having originated the fictional detective mystery, as forefather of crime fiction. Poe's footnotes to "The Mystery of Marie Roget," by revealing his inspiration for the invented tale in the actual murder of Mary Cecelia Rogers, undermine the tale's fictional basis and, I would like to suggest, substitute crime-story status. And in fact I believe that the hypothesis Poe advanced to solve the case of Marie Roget has been demonstrated to resolve the Rogers conundrum as well.

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JAMES HITCHCOCK replies: Professor Dabundo is certainly right to point out Poe's role in the development of the crime genre, a role which would have to be discussed in any comprehensive treatment of the subject. At present I agree with the contention of John Walsh, in his *Poe the Detective,* that Poe did not solve the murder of Mary Rogers. However, one of the pleasures of the genre is that it leaves ample opportunity for changing one's mind.

The Law's Leaden Muse

Judge Richard Posner displays his characteristic erudition and intellect in his review of my book, *The Oxford Dictionary of American Legal Quotations,* in your Summer 1994 issue. Some of his points, however, merit response.

Judge Posner praises my success in collecting "all the most famous law-related quotations"; he says he missed only Justice Jackson's "We are not final because we are infallible, but we are infallible because we are final." Posner has neglected the extensive keyword index, which would have told him that that quote in fact appears on page 21 of the book. He doesn't like that phrase "all the most famous" because "most famous" is not

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a class with a determinate membership. True, I suppose, but it is interesting to note that Posner himself devoted much of his book, *Cardozo: A Study in Reputation*, to exploring objective measures of fame, referring twice to my own work in citation analysis.

Posner's main thrust is that he would prefer a legal quotation dictionary exclusively composed of "passages of outstanding literary merit or piercing insight." This, the Judge acknowledges, would be a short book. I'd say it would be a very short book, and would consist primarily of quotations by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., Robert H. Jackson, and Learned Hand. That little book exists—it is a subset of my book—but I chose to merge it with a compilation of the most famous (there I go again) and historically important legal quotes to create a reference work with a variety of uses.

Posner wishes that I had covered British quotations. I do too, but a work on this level of comprehensiveness and scholarliness, a level no other quotation dictionary in any field has even attempted, takes a lot of research. If I had endeavored to do for British law and literature what I did for American law and literature, I don't think the book would ever have been finished.

FRED R. SHAPIRO
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Meanwhile, Back on the Ward . . .

As I read Jay Neugeboren's essay about his mentally ill brother Robert, "Meanwhile, Back on the Ward . . ." from the Summer 1994 AMERICAN SCHOLAR, my feelings went from sympathy for his brother's predicament to puzzlement about his condition to outrage about Mr. Neugeboren's ungrateful attitude to the mental health profession that has cared for Robert and kept him going all these years. Mr. Neugeboren reflects the kind of phenomenon similar to that which, as I recall, Orwell quoted from a poem of Kipling about individuals who "curse those who guard them while they sleep." Before my retirement I met a lot of "Roberts" and their relatives. Their laments are all very similar. They contribute to both the financial and moral bankruptcy of the modern world. But Mr. Neugeboren has added a new element to their complaints, one about a therapy not yet even developed.

Of course clearly Robert's behavior, including such episodes as attempted murder of his father, attempts at self-immolation, and other rampages have been horrific. Yet Robert has his tender moments and is, we are led to believe, capable of much more than he has achieved. But medicine and society itself, Mr. Neugeboren implies, have seriously let Robert down and prevented this.

Robert is non-compliant. And when he drinks and inhales amyl nitrite, or refuses to take his medication, he goes on rampages. But for all its advances, medical science can't explain why he is non-compliant or otherwise sets himself off. And no matter what services are provided for Robert within the hospital, they are, we are informed, always insufficient. Most recently, Mr. Neugeboren complains, he has been told that Robert can't tolerate and so has been denied "therapy." What therapy? Since Robert is loaded up with various medications to calm him after one of his rampages, presumably Mr. Neugeboren is complaining that psychotherapy has been withheld. But he is simply mistaken if he thinks that this could help Robert in the condition he describes.

In his more lucid moments Robert harbors some considerably sophisticated cynical resentment for what is "done" to him. Nevertheless, he expresses little interest in exactly what sets him off or leads him to stop taking his medication. Those caring for him are, he says, "barbarians" and perhaps even worse, "Pavlovians" presumably because of their well-intentioned behavior modification programs. The drugs he receives, he says, are "how they make their profit," implying of course that they don't do him any good, and he has no reason to be grateful for their existence or their beneficial effects. What Mr. Neugeboren is saying in essence is that his brother may be crazy but look how impressive it is that this tender sensitive soul can nevertheless analyze and expose these barbaric hypocrisies and abuses of the mental health profession. What is striking about Robert, and Mr. Neugeboren as well, is that neither expresses any gratitude or sense of appreciation to the medical establishment for having kept Robert alive and as relatively well as they have over the thirty years of his illness.

There has been at least one real albeit unsanctioned abuse of Robert. Many years ago in a different institution, Robert, in a strait jacket, induced hospital aides to give him a cigarette to smoke with which he tried to set himself on fire. Later one of them took him down to the cellar, beat him up, and told him never to try that again. This was indeed truly a barbarian act. But then one wonders, outgrageous and unpleasant as it was, did this experience convince Robert that he *shouldn't* try to set himself on fire again. Corporal punishment under suitably strictly su-

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pervised conditions is being increasingly advocated in the management of misbehavior of some miscreants. Mr. Neugeboren's essay helps explain why some factions in our society are advocating or at least are sympathetic to this social reversion. Of course Robert would denounce this too as barbaric and "Pavlovian." But then he might begin to give some real attention to what sets him off on his rampages.

Mr. Neugeboren informs us he is happy to accept the current fashionable explanation that Robert's illness is a "biochemical" disease. This removes the stigma of the disorder and perhaps equally important increases flow of insurance payments for Robert's care he tells us. It also presumably reduces any need to expect Robert himself to take some responsibility for his own actions and not drink or otherwise prevent relapses, let alone feel any guilt for what he has done. But Mr. Neugeboren has one complaint about this explanation. If the disorder is after all really chemical in cause, this implies there may eventually be a real chemical cure. What, I wondered, could possibly be wrong with such a development? Mr. Neugeboren has an extraordinary answer. While a chemical cure might treat Robert permanently and prevent any future ravages of the disease, how, he wails, could it repair the past? How could it restore Robert's lost years! I have heard many complaints about the failures of clinical medicine in a long career from which I have retired, but Mr. Neugeboren has indeed hit upon a new one. It cannot change the past! Nor, he might have added, can it as yet bring the dead back to life, make us immortal, or produce perpetual youth.

Meanwhile, despite all the research advances achieved, still on occasion after a rampage, Robert must languish in a hospital ward, or sometimes worse, in a bare private room. The ward itself is a true nightmare. Among the many other torments such as bingo games and television, the refrigerator is padlocked, Mr. Neugeboren tells us, and poor Robert can get snacks between meals only twice a day! The hundreds of thousands of dollars perhaps even millions expended upon Robert in the past thirty years by society, the thousands of hours of care expended upon him by health care workers who have labored to keep him from being a hazard to himself and to others are ignored, unacknowledged, and unappreciated. Robert's relatively good survival is attributed only to . . . Robert.

SEBASTIAN J. MORIARTY
Inverness, California

JAY NEUGEBOREN replies: Dr. Moriarty "wonders" about the use of corporal punishment on mentally ill "miscreants" like my brother Robert. One can only wonder, then, about Dr. Moriarty's views on this subject, which, though he couches them in the passive voice ("Corporal punishment under suitable strictly supervised conditions is being increasingly advocated in the management of misbehavior of some miscreants"), thus seeming to absolve himself of responsibility (who is doing the advocating, when and where, and does Dr. Moriarty join this advocacy?), seem beneath both contempt and commentary.

Dr. Moriarty's other remarks do not rise much above this level, revealing a psychiatric version of benevolent despotism that is, to say the least, as ill-informed as it is heartless. He suggests, among other things, that a physical beating might wake Robert up to the causes of his breakdowns; that psychotherapy for those suffering psychotic breakdowns is useless; and that Robert's major problem is that he has not taken "responsibility for his own actions" or felt "guilt for what he has done."

Robert and others with lives like his are hospitalized on locked wards precisely because they are unable to care for themselves and/or are a danger to themselves and others—i.e., because they are unable, for all kinds of reasons (chemical and otherwise), to take responsibility for their lives, and, often, to have any insight into why they feel and act the way they do. If, as Dr. Moriarty says, psychotherapy cannot help Robert in this condition, how—the condition licensing his incarceration—fault and mock ("poor") Robert for having no insight into his condition and for not taking responsibility for it?

Dr. Moriarty misreads me thoroughly when he says that I "wail" because chemical cures will be "unable to repair the past" or "restore Robert's lost years." I do no such thing. What I say is fairly rudimentary: that we need to understand the past, and its specific weight and force in the lives of the chronically mentally ill, if we are to be of help to them in the present and the future.

"What upsets me whenever I hear language about breakthrough cures and genetic markers and brain disease," I write, "is not the possibility that Robert's condition is chemical, but the belief so many people have in its corollary: that if the condition is chemical, it can be corrected with chemicals." For, I explain, "even if we find cause and cure, what then do we do with the life lived, and the history—and fear, and shame, and doubt, and despair, and sheer misery—that have accompanied that life?" Further: " . . . even if we do one day separate out the gene or the neuron that proves to be the cause of what we decide is this or that species of mental illness,

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what then will we do about the life that has come before and will continue after the moment of diagnosis and medication, and of how the fact of having this condition has affected an individual's history."

Dr. Moriarty finds it "striking" that neither Robert nor I express "any gratitude or sense of appreciation to the medical establishment for having kept Robert alive and as relatively well as they have over the thirty years of his illness," and says that I am like those who "curse those who guard them while they sleep."

During the past thirty-two years of Robert's life, many psychiatrists, social workers, psychotherapists, nurses, aides, and other professionals have been caring, compassionate, and helpful. But the medical profession, especially as I have known it at state hospitals during these years, has often lacked the very qualities most needed for its difficult work: competence, intelligence, imagination, and compassion. (For a comprehensive rendering of the virtues and failings of mental health care workers and their treatment of the mentally ill, see, for example, Susan Sheehan's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Is There No Place on Earth for Me?*, which takes place at two of the hospitals—Hillside and Creedmoor—where Robert spent most of his early years as a mental patient.)

My attempt, in "Meanwhile, Back on the Ward . . . ," was more modest: to try to understand and render a part of the story of my brother's life—a grim and lonely life at least as full of sadness and misery as it is, at times, of wonder. In so doing, how not lament the fact that, despite all the research into mental illness and all the genuine gains, not much, on a ward such as the one Robert is locked into, has changed in thirty-two years? How not lament the fact that, on such locked wards, now as three decades ago, custodial needs seem, often, to take precedence over human needs? How not be aware that though research into the biochemical basis for mental illness may have vast implications for the future, it has little to contribute to individuals like Robert in the present? How not be aware, in a time when large sums of money are being invested in the search for chemical causes and cures, that we seem to have made few gains in our ability to know how to care for those with long-term, chronic mental illness?

To do as Dr. Moriarty does—which is, essentially, to blame those with mental illness for their condition, and to thereby justify methods of treatment (or non-treatment) as rich in cruelty as they are wanting in imagination and simple human kindness—is to regress to an attitude more inflexible and mean-spirited than most of what Robert and I have encountered during these past thirty-two years.

The *Schindler's List* Effect

The Spielberg "apologists" that Michael Bernstein disparages in his article "The *Schindler's List* Effect" in the Summer 1994 AMERICAN SCHOLAR are at least in accord with the practicalities of communication: the Primo Levis can inform the thinkers among us; to affect the sensibilities of the masses, the methods of a Spielberg are required.

This is a long-recognized principle. Upon meeting Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lincoln is reputed to have said, "So you're the little lady who started this great, big War." A similar figure today could as well remark to Spielberg: "So you're the one who closed the public mind to the Holocaust deniers." This is no trivial accomplishment.

RICHARD LIETO
Point Pleasant, New Jersey

MICHAEL ANDRÉ BERNSTEIN replies: In a few words, Richard Lieto unwittingly crystallizes the moral obtuseness of "The *Schindler's List* Effect" more effectively than did my original piece. To him, there exists an unbridgeable gulf between "the thinkers among us," who demand works that can "inform" them, and everyone else—Lieto's ureflecting "masses"—who are able to absorb only stimuli that "affect their sensibilities," and require "the methods of a Spielberg" in order to muster any response at all. Even leaving aside the uncomfortable similarity between this description and the ways fascism conceived of the relationship between the inspired leader and his passive audience, Lieto's praise, like Spielberg's own more calculated simplifications, cannot help demeaning both the movie's spectators and its theme. People cannot be divided into such sterile categories without thereby becoming reduced to identical ciphers, each replaceable by any other member of the group. One consequence of this sort of reductiveness is heard in phrases like "the Primo Levis," as though we had been granted more than one author like Levi, or as though Levi's writings were not among this century's most emotionally wrenching, as well as intellectually lucid, testaments. And if it is always perilous to consign human beings to immutable categories, then surely this is all the more true in a discussion of the Holocaust, which enacted the most lethal and absolute categorization of all. The language

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of condescension begins to resemble the language of absolutism the moment it presumes to know what human beings require and what they are capable of, depending only on their membership in an arbitrary but all-defining classification. Yet emotional responses, as much as intellectual, moral, or aesthetic ones, are always personal and can never be justified or predicted on the basis of crude, monolithic categorizations. Because we respond to experiences as individuals whose capacity simultaneously to feel and think can be educated and widened, not merely manipulated, the worst possible defense of a work on a serious theme is that it succeeds in arousing its audience's reactions by not challenging them beyond the supposedly fixed limits of their inborn aptitude. Such a defense is nothing more than a rationalization of exploitation, and it is precisely because *Schindler's List* uses the Holocaust as a backdrop for what is finally only another Hollywood spectacle, with all the clichés and stereotypes of the genre securely in place, that it is so appalling a film.

In this context, Mr. Lieto's invocation of Harriet Beecher Stowe is wonderfully apposite, but hardly in the way he seems to believe. *Schindler's List* does, indeed, have much in common with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, including an inability to tell its story except through the language and perspective of those with power, and the conviction that to be deserving of sympathy, the oppressed must be represented as impervious to sensual temptation, full of "Christian forgiveness" at their mistreatment, and shufflingly grateful for any charity they receive from their master. It is not by chance that the epithet "Uncle Tom" has become so bitter a taunt, and it is startling to see the consanguinity between Stowe's and Spielberg's characterizations recommended so enthusiastically.

But it is also only fair to admit that my criticism of *Schindler's List* has prompted numerous similar replies, all defending the movie on similar grounds as Richard Lieto's: namely, its efficacy in bringing the Holocaust into the consciousness of people who would otherwise not be aware of it at all. To this, I can only reply that beyond the fervent reiteration of the claim, there is no evidence whatsoever that the movie has "closed the public mind to the Holocaust deniers," and that it is dubious how such extravagant assertions could be tested with any rigor. On the contrary, what little sociological data does exist suggests that the film has only fed directly into the current American insistence upon identity as primarily constituted by claims of historical victimization, with all its attendant competitiveness among different groups about whose suffering was greater and whose demands for compensatory rectification are therefore more justified. More generally, though, I want to insist that in the long term, a clichéd and reductive historical representation, even if it were politically efficacious in some immediate context, risks leaving behind an interpretation so distorted that it can damage the very cause it tries to help. "Holocaust Lite" is how one of my friends, whose grandparents had died in the camps, succinctly described the film. What Spielberg's movie can really do, it seems to me, is to "close the public mind" not to the "Holocaust deniers," but rather to the scope and savagery of the event itself and to the complex humanity of its victims.

Billy Blake's Trial

I was astounded by the power and beauty of Brian Doyle's piece on William Blake in the Autumn 1994 issue. An attempt to analyze its power and beauty would require its dismemberment as one would tear apart an exquisite flower, and so I shall not attempt to do so. It suffices to say that this tribute to Blake's goodness and genius is worth every minute—nay, every second—of the five years spent in writing it. It served to send me back to my Blake collections to feast again upon the astonishing illustrations and poems and to ponder the inexplicable mystery of his being in the world.

Thank you Brian Doyle for your work of love.

JOANNE BRONARS
Department of Education
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Brooklyn, New York

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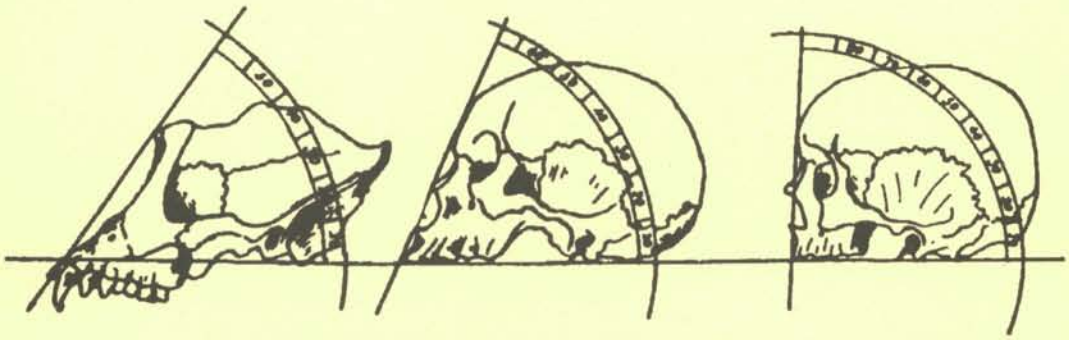

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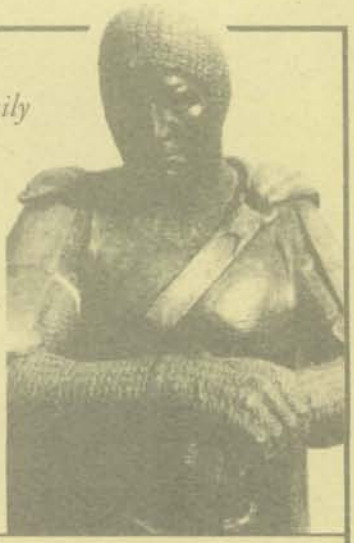

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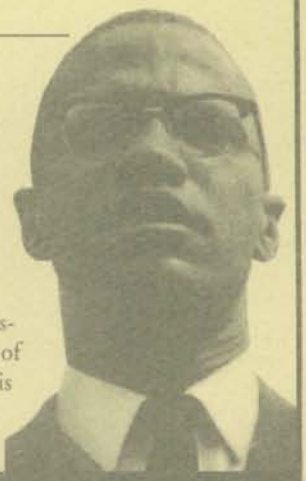

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